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Surfer Rosa – A celebration

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS + DREAMPOP COLLECTOR'S GUIDE

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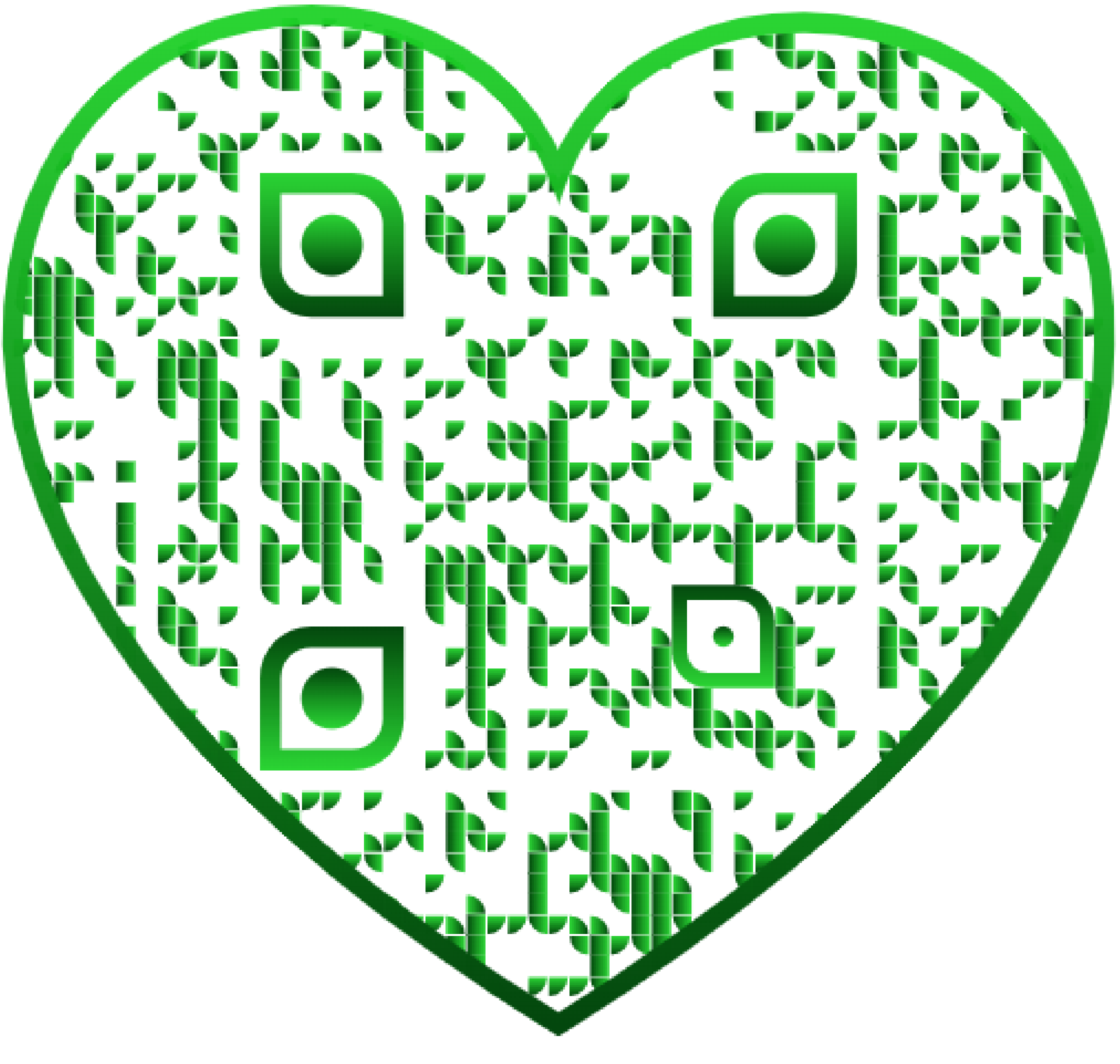

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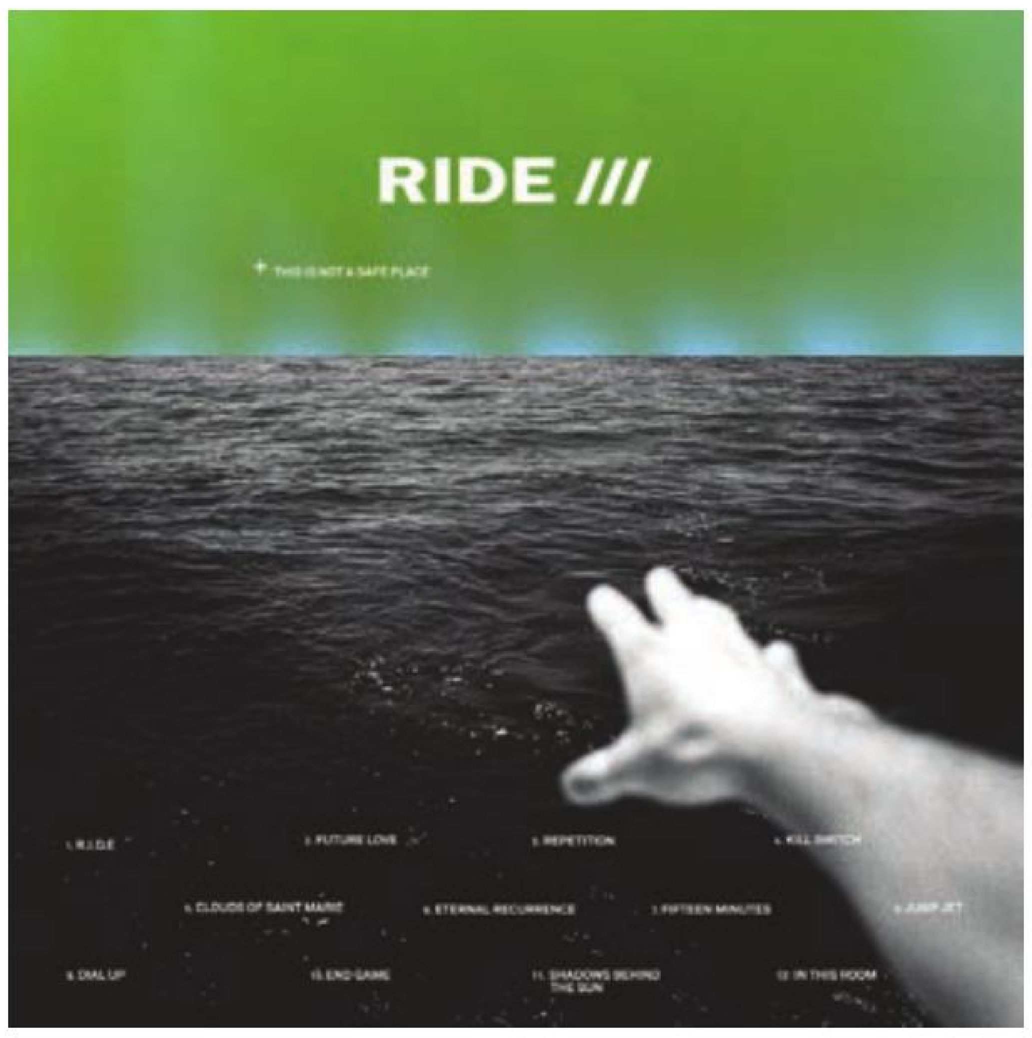

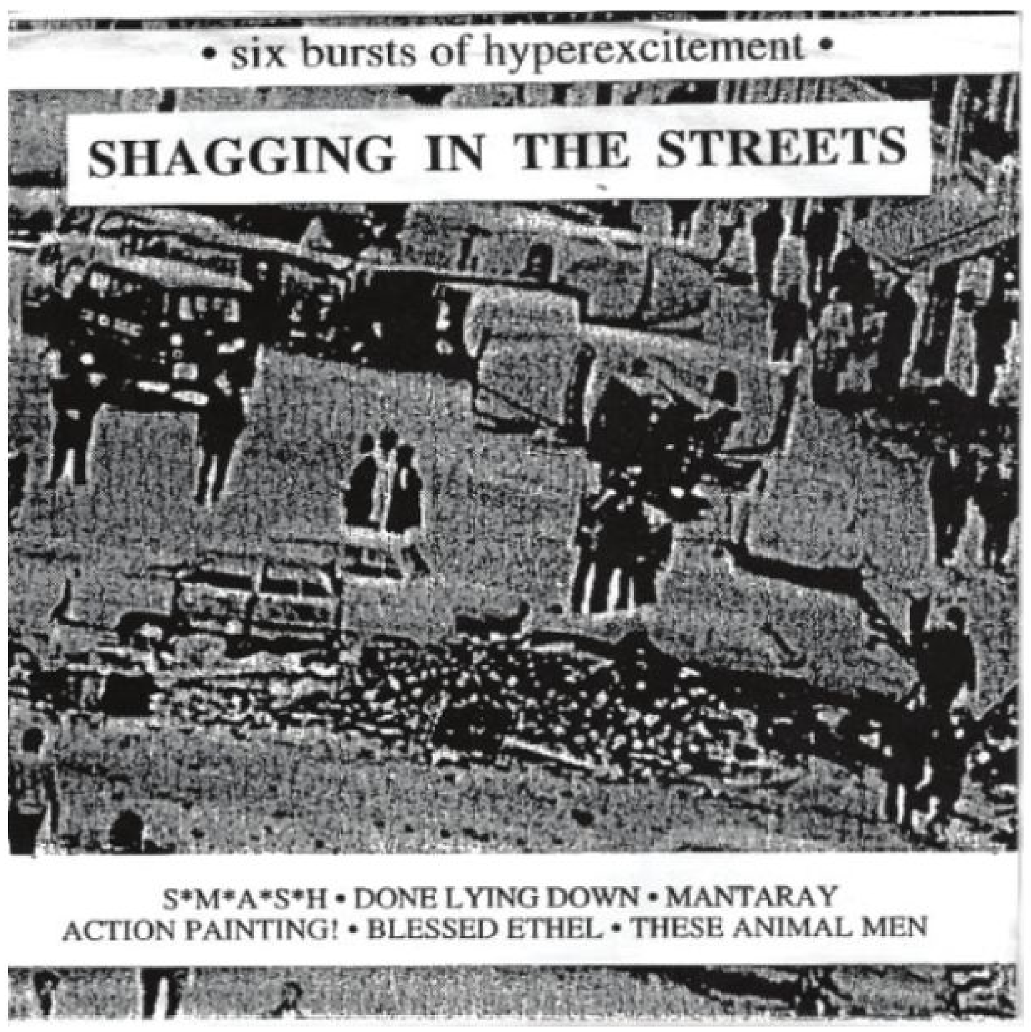

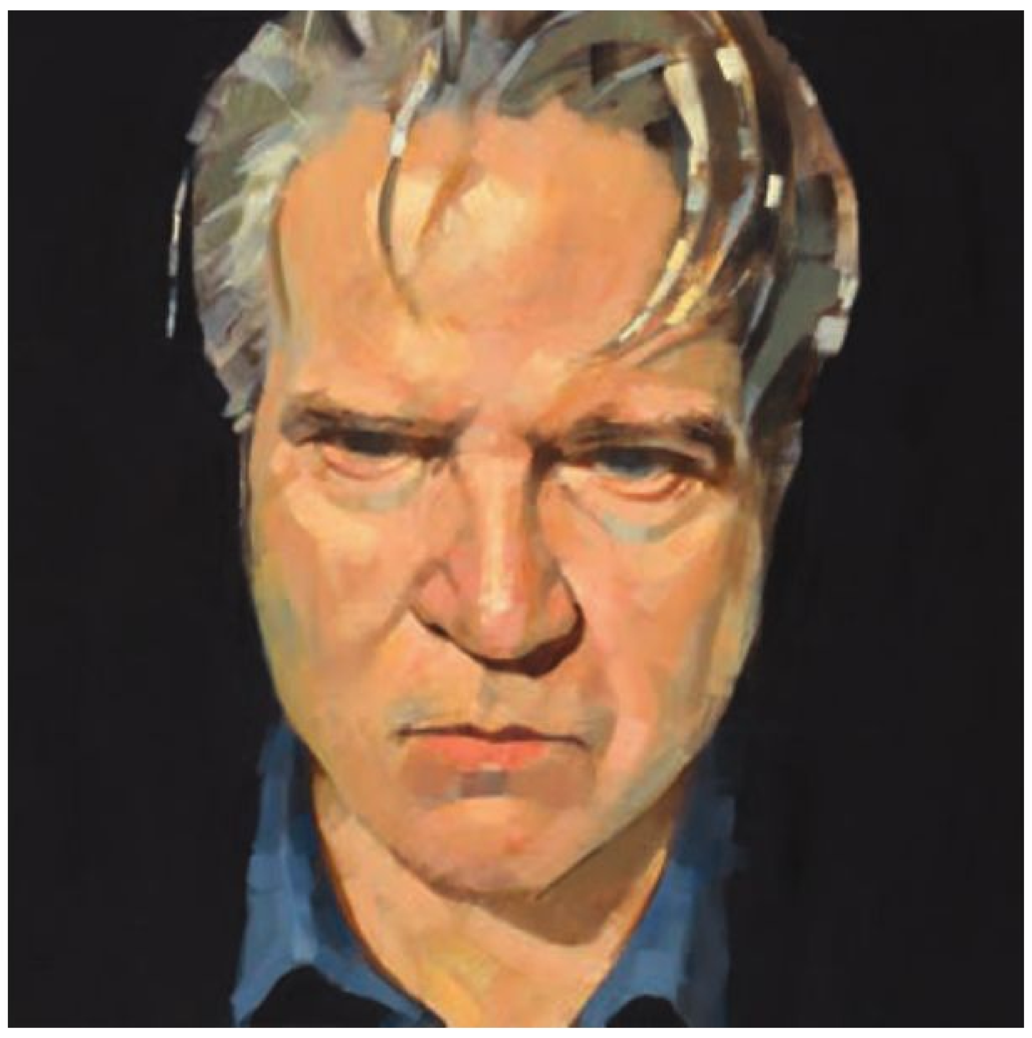

Welcome...

Retaining the DIY ethos of their punk forebears, some of the finest music from across the past 40 years has been served up by indie artists, proudly cocking a snook at the major label big boys from the independent sideline. Diversity has always been at the heart of the indie scene and this mini guide aims to provide a delicious tasting menu of its grand sweep; from the spiky Pixies and noisenik delights of Sonic Youth to the dance rock hybrid of Primal Scream's masterpiece album, *Screamadelica*. We also bring the story bang up to date thanks to new interviews with Ride and Johnny Marr about their stunning latest releases. Proof positive that indie rock is in as rude health as ever.

Steve

Steve Harnell, Editor
Follow me on Twitter: @steve_harnell

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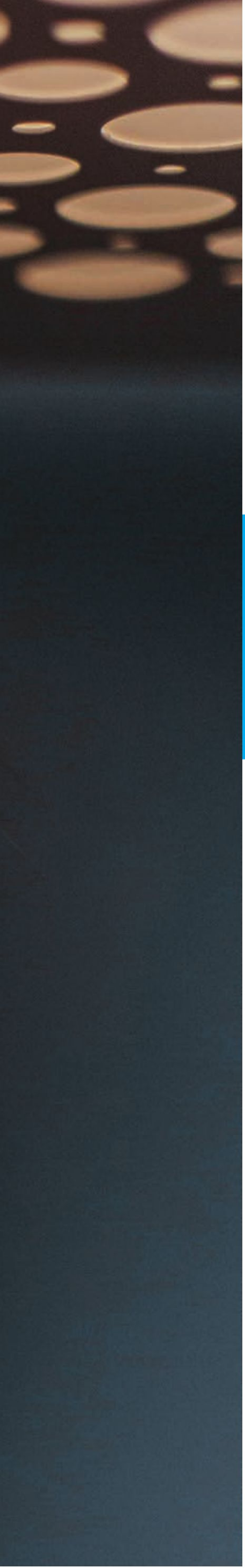

THURSTON MOORE

SONIC FINGERPRINTS

Thurston Moore's latest solo album, *Rock N Roll Consciousness,* is a work fuelled by the meditative effects that record collecting has had on the celebrated former Sonic Youth man and Jazzmaster-wielding noisenik's psyche. **Chris Parkin** meets a pioneering artist who takes inspiration from the most eclectic of sources…

There are plenty of songs that obsess over records. Pet Shop Boys' *The Pop Kids*, The Carpenters' *Yesterday Once More*, Adam Ant's *B-Side Baby*… it's a long list. There are also a bewildering number of albums inspired by the practice of meditation – Alice Coltrane's sprawling back catalogue, for a start. But albums inspired by the meditative effect of record collecting? Not so much. Thurston Moore's latest (fifth) album under his own name, *Rock N Roll Consciousness*, might just be the first.

The former Sonic Youth man still collects obsessively, hunting down records of a free-jazz persuasion and rare anthologies and journals of underground post-war poetry. This long-term habit, which started when Moore was still a pup and took off during punk, continues to inform most of what he does – from the sounds he conjures up to the Ecstatic Peace publishing imprint he runs. Moore was even invited to run poetry workshops at Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School Of Disembodied Poetics – the name of an *actual* literary arts program; look it up on Google if you don't believe us – after they heard about his collection.

The school was set up in 1974 in Boulder, Colorado by Buddhist guru Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. He's no longer with us, but Moore remains fascinated with him. Trungpa taught meditation to David Bowie and Alan Ginsberg ("*Anyone* who was Alan Ginsberg's teacher is going to be pretty insane," laughs Moore) and employed John Cage and William Burroughs as lecturers. Moore also enjoys Naropa's

"IT'S ABOUT A BALANCE BETWEEN THE SPIRITUALITY IN ROCK 'N' ROLL MUSIC, BLUES MUSIC AND JAZZ MUSIC. TO ME, THAT'S WHY THAT MUSIC IS SO GALVANISING – SOCIALLY, ANYWAY"

spirit of humanitarian kindness. But he finds meditation – of which there is a lot at Naropa – just isn't for him. Which got him thinking: "Where do I find *my* sense of connection between the physical and metaphysical, my sense of enlightenment, my sense of peace?"

Moore's answer explains why record collectors are happy to spend so much time flicking through dusty boxes – and it also inspired the title of his new album. "It has to do with being among the documents, the second-hand records and books, that I have this vibrational, physical, tactile connection with," he explains. "They have a history of other people's imprints on them. I find that going to record stores and sifting through the bins – beyond the hunt and the consumerism of it, just sort of being there – is something I find meditational. I can spend inordinate amounts of time in these places. That's where *Rock N Roll Consciousness* came from, as a title, at least."

Moore, who's still eternally boyish and full of articulate enthusiasm at 58, says that surrounding himself with literature and music did, at some unspecific point in his life, "become very cosmic; just the beauty and depth and profundity of what is happening in it". He might not be singing paeans to his favourite Don Cherry and Glenn Branca albums on *Rock N Roll Consciousness*, but its five tracks are certainly a meditative listening experience, which taps into the ideas and energy contained in Moore's vast collection.

Citing the influence of the drawn-out compositions performed by Germany's avant-industrial collective Einstürzende Neubauten and Michael Gira's mighty noise rockers Swans, Moore lets his trademark mix of chiming space rock and alt-rock noise – a sound he's synonymous with after 30 years in Sonic Youth and four previous solo albums – play out hypnotically throughout the grooves of *Rock N Roll Consciousness*.

"It's about a balance between the spirituality in rock 'n' roll music, blues music and jazz music," says Moore. "To me, that's why that music is so galvanising – socially, anyway. I hear it in Michael Gira's Swans, where he likes to lose himself and play simple blues refrains among this chaotic discord that comes in and out while he's singing. I understand where he's coming from. He's channelling this feeling of being uplifted by music

Left to right: bassist Deb Googe, drummer Steve Shelley, Thurston and guitarist James Sedwards

IN LONDON'S FLASHBACK RECORDS SHOP IN 2014, MOORE LET HIS MUSIC TAKE OVER, AS HE DID WITH SONIC YOUTH, AND ATTACKED THE RACKS OF RECORDS WITH HIS GUITAR

that seems to come up from the earth. I've always felt that's what I want to do. It's the intrigue, the mystery of the unknown; that feeling of transcendence."

Despite Moore's allusions to musical shamanism and avant-garde noise, *Rock N Roll Consciousness* is remarkably accessible. It's warmly empathetic and recognisably a Thurston Moore album. But Moore's experiments in allowing his songs to evolve and unfurl without definition are bolder than on his previous solo release, 2014's *The Best Day*. There's also a real sense of intimacy, thanks to some captivating lyrics about feminist mysticism from pseudonym-employing poet Radieux Radio and the surging, tight-knit sound of a group that Moore calls a "nice second act" after Sonic Youth. This band, cobbled together shortly after Moore moved to London in 2013 and featuring gifted guitarist James Sedwards, My Bloody Valentine bassist Debbie Googe and old Sonic Youth comrade and drummer Steve Shelley, will be around for a while yet.

"I think there was a sense that *The Best Day* was just another transitional moment for me. Like, 'maybe he'll come out next time juggling amplified chainsaws. What's he going to do next?' I can see how it could have looked like a dalliance, but I didn't want it to be seen as that, because I knew right away that this is a strong entity."

Anyone who saw one of Moore and Sedwards' earliest shows together, in the basement of London's Flashback Records shop in 2014, will know what he's talking about. Probably to the horror of record buyers in the shop at the time, Moore let his music take over – as he did so often with Sonic Youth – and attacked the racks of records with his guitar, while Sedwards built a spacey cacophony behind him.

This act of record-shop vandalism doesn't mark a change in his love of vinyl, though. Now that Moore is the master of his own destiny, with his own name on the front of the album and on gig posters, it means he can do even more record shopping.

"The other day, I was rehearsing for The Can Project," says Moore, about the band he put together for a recent tribute to the Krautrock legends at London's Barbican. "I was asked to put together and direct this octet, with Steve Shelley on drums. I took it very seriously and for three days, we rehearsed diligently. At the end of the second day, Steve looked up and was like: 'I've never seen Thurston want to rehearse before, he usually wants to fuck off to the record store'. 'But Steve, I'm trying to take my job seriously!' In Sonic Youth, I was always like, 'rehearsal, shmersel – let's go to the record store'."

FREE-JAZZ MASTER

Now Moore's free to indulge his habit as and when. Since moving to Stoke Newington in 2013, he has been unearthing treasure troves of underground post-war poetry. Artist-run journals, "mimeo staple-stabbed publications from the 60s and 70s" and collections from counter-culture archivist Barry Miles' 60s bookshop, Indica. But records still dominate his life. On arrival in north-east London, Moore immersed himself in the free improvisational scene around London's Café OTO venue and he's toured all over the UK, stopping at small ▶

Getty

Thurston in full flow in 2005 at ArthurFest in Los Feliz, California

venues and even smaller record shops. So what are Moore's tips for seeking out his favoured free-jazz and avant-garde records?

"Just hit the wall," he laughs. "I told [Swedish free-jazz saxophonist and collaborator] Mats Gustafsson that. He's an unbridled free-jazz collector. We would go into stores when we first did this Japanese tour together years ago and he was so ravenous, he would immediately start ploughing through the bins.

"But I had this thing where, before going to the bins, I would scan the walls. That's usually where the proprietor puts the 'heavy' items. I would be pulling them off the wall and Mats would see what I had and start crying. You *have* to hit the walls."

And if that fails? "A lot of records I like are actually *underneath* the bins. I'm really into looking in spoken-word boxes and I have this thing about collecting contemporary poetry records. But they're generally under the bins. Real backbreakers."

In his meditative record-shopping daze, Moore can cope with the discomfort. And anyway, there's magic to be harnessed. Moore's theory about records containing energy, ideas and historical imprints recalls Alfred Watkins' original idea of ley lines. Like the important historical meaning in Neolithic structures and the avenues and roads that link them together, lines – and stories – can be theoretically drawn between records and books. It's the reason why so many musicians and artists surround themselves with inspiring artefacts. Elton John has his collection of photography (and hip-hop) and, as Moore points out, David Bowie had a giant haul of books.

"He said one of the saddest things in his life was that he wouldn't be able to process every book in his library," recalls Moore. "So after he died, I was like, 'Where's his library?' That's the book *I* want to see: a bibliography of David Bowie's library. Man, I'd be really curious. Supposedly, he kept it in a separate location, which makes it even more enchanting. Like, where is that? Where did he go to be around his books?"

"I HAD THIS THING WHERE, BEFORE GOING TO THE BINS, I WOULD SCAN THE WALLS. THAT'S USUALLY WHERE THE PROPRIETOR PUTS THE 'HEAVY' ITEMS"

Slightly envious of Bowie, Moore says his own collection would be *much* bigger if he could afford it. Compelled to collect and archive from a young age – not yet understanding the Zen-like purpose of his actions – buying records and books has affected Moore's life in many ways.

"People always used to ask me, 'How come you weren't a typical New York loft-dwelling junkie?'. Well, I *was* New York and I *was* loft-dwelling, but I wasn't a junkie, because why spend money on dope when you can spend it on records?"

And we have to agree. Just say no… Records are much better for you. ●

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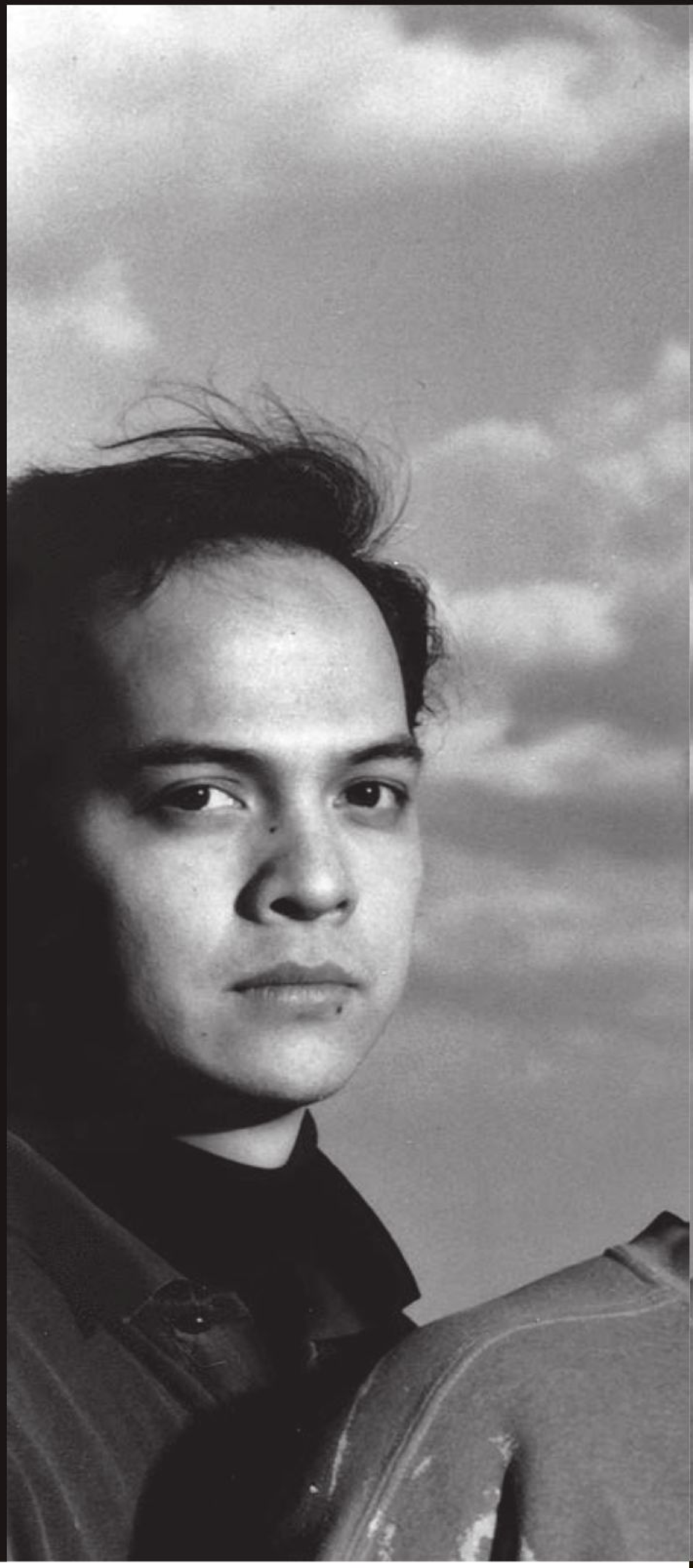
ROSA OH OH OHH ROSA



As 4AD releases a deluxe boxset to mark the 30th anniversary of Pixies' *Surfer Rosa*, **Gary Walker** speaks to the chief protagonists behind one of indie music's most influential and otherly classics. With contributions from Black Francis, Joey Santiago, Vaughan Oliver and Simon Larbalestier, *Long Live Vinyl* unravels the legacy of a stunningly dark debut…

A thrilling wave of mutilation, voyeurism, violence, incest, superheroes, venereal disease, primal screaming, Catholic guilt and topless flamenco dancers… Billy Corgan called it "the one that made me go 'holy shit'", PJ Harvey gasped that it "blew my mind" and David Bowie said it was the best music made in the 80s. Kurt Cobain admitted to ripping it off and said of first hearing *Surfer Rosa* he "should have been in that band". Pixies' debut album turned 30 this year and remains as timeless, dark, surreal, unsettling and captivating as it was when four goofy kids emerged from Boston's Q Division Studios with a scowling Steve Albini and the master tapes in hand, three decades ago.

In December 1987, the old order reigned over the album charts, with Rick Astley, UB40, Michael Jackson, Paul McCartney, George Michael and Fleetwood Mac dominating as Christmas approached. But a new disaffected, exciting alternative wave was about to break, led by Charles Thompson – aka Black Francis; Philippines-born guitar mangler Joey Santiago; Mrs John Murphy – aka Kim Deal, and drummer David Lovering. It would lead ultimately to Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins, Radiohead and the rise of grunge – a revolutionary breed hell-bent on washing away the cloying excesses of 80s rawk and replacing it with something provocative, urgent and raw.

To uncover the roots of *Surfer Rosa*, though, we first have to dig back to the 17-song *Purple Tape* demo produced by Gary Smith and recorded and mixed in a total of just six days in March 1987 at Boston's Fort Apache Studios, using $1,000 borrowed from Francis' father. The band's then-manager, Ken Goes, sent the tape to a string of US and European record labels without sparking interest, before 4AD

Surfer Rosa's iconic album artwork was a collaboration between 4AD's Vaughan Oliver and photographer Simon Larbalestier

The Pixies, circa *Rosa* (l to r): Joey Santiago, Black Francis, Kim Deal and David Lovering

Millicent Harvey

Bassist and vocalist Kim Deal co-wrote ***Surfer Rosa*****'s** only single, the anthemic ***Gigantic***

Andrew Caitlin

boss Ivo Watts-Russell bit. Popular legend has it that Watts-Russell was initially unsure, but was encouraged to persevere with the tape by his then-girlfriend. Yet he later recalled of *The Purple Tape*: "I absolutely adored it from day one, because my day one was marching around New York with it in a Walkman. It was very exciting. It was the obvious things, Joey's guitar playing and the Spanish aspect to it."

WEIRD AT MY SCHOOL

The label's creative driving force, Vaughan Oliver, was dispatched to a gig at Rhode Island School Of Design to check out Watts-Russell's potential new charges. Fresh from creating the new edition's artwork, Oliver tells *Long Live Vinyl*: "Hearing them for the first time was *The Purple Tape*, and I didn't know what Ivo was interested in there. I didn't get it, and I wouldn't have signed them, but by chance or coincidence, I was going to the States on a flat-swap and I was there just at the time Ivo was considering them. He said: 'Go and see them', and I was blown away. Then I met them, and I reported back and said: 'I'm on board'. There started a 30-year relationship."

The 4AD boss offered to put out his pick of eight songs from *The Purple Tape,* remastered, as the mini-album *Come On Pilgrim*, named after a Larry Norman lyric that reminded Francis of Billy Pilgrim from Kurt Vonnegut Jr's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In a label who'd released albums by Cocteau Twins, Nick Cave's The Birthday Party and their New England friends Throwing Muses, Pixies found a welcoming home for their uncompromising brand of surreal, sexualised sonic fury. Decompressing on a hotel bed in Des Moines Iowa, two weeks into the band's current world tour, Francis' voice fizzes with enthusiasm as he tells *Long Live Vinyl*: "It was a perfect fit. 4AD was not all about the kind of mainstream popular music that MTV had become. I remember when Vaughan Oliver sent me the *Come On Pilgrim* sleeve mock-up. I was working in a warehouse, just down the road from the warehouse where Joey worked in Boston Harbour. Opening up the packaging and seeing that sepia-toned photograph of the hairy-backed guy… I'd just dropped out of college, I was really into art-film, I'd discovered David Lynch, so I was all about this kind of artsy thing. I didn't have much of an artsy vocabulary, but I just had an inkling that this is what I am, and the world I want to occupy, so when I got that sleeve, it was art with a capital A, and I quit my job that day. It was perfect. The hairy-backed guy…"

THE 4AD CONNECTION

The connection with the British label was similarly immediate for Santiago: "They were great. I don't know what would have happened if we'd got into a typical major record label vibe, but they were really artsy and creative, we could tell we were going to get along with them."

Watts-Russell later recalled: "They were friendly, enthusiastic, polite people who were just genuinely [thrilled] somebody was going to put their record out. I don't think they knew much about 4AD at all. The only thing I remember from my first meeting with them was Joey saying: 'All I care about is that you make me famous in the Philippines, because the chicks are really pretty'. That's probably the most I ever heard Joey say, really…"

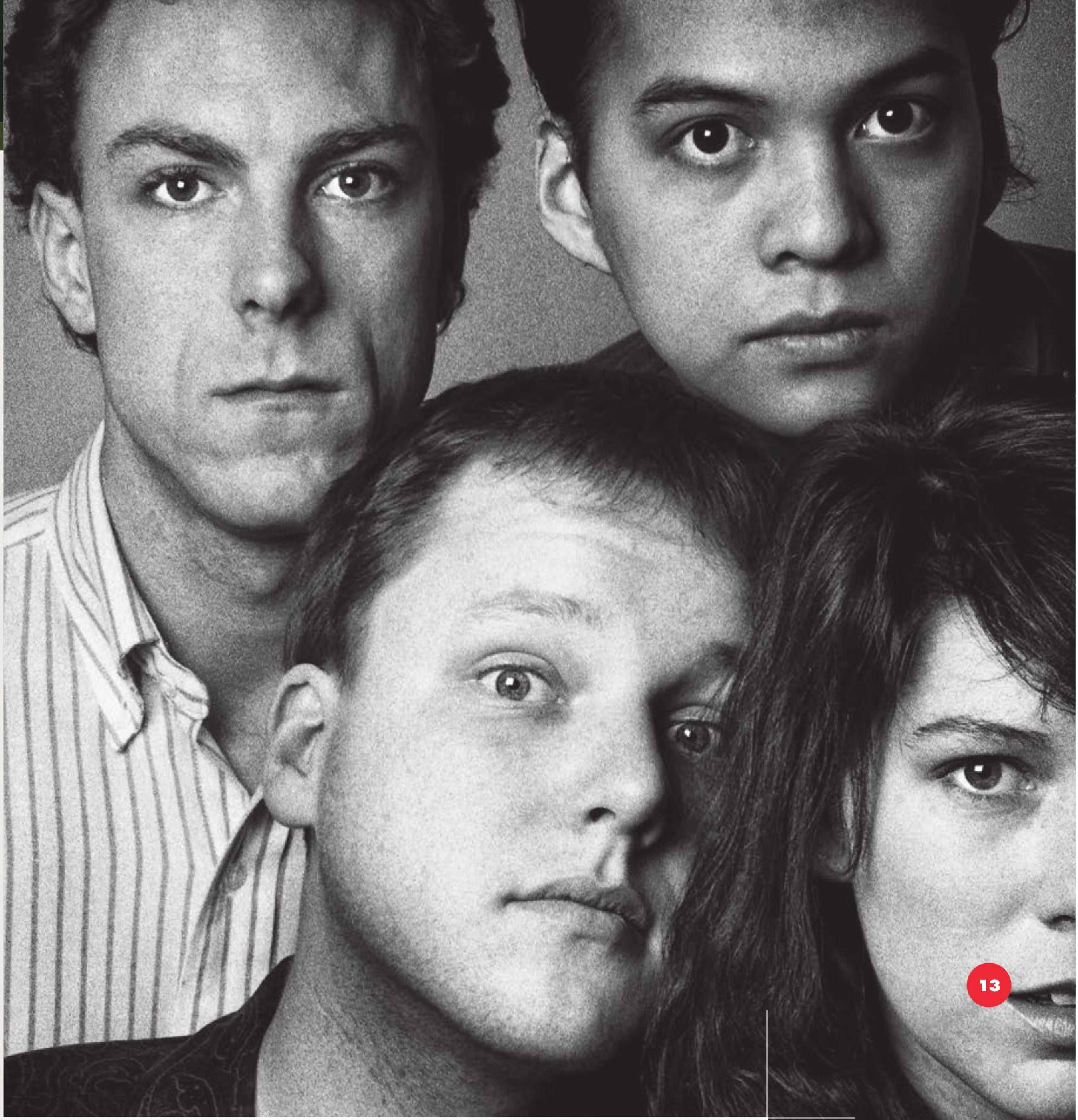
With *Come On Pilgrim* released in the UK, 4AD warehouse manager Colin Wallace suggested former Big Black frontman Steve Albini to oversee the recording of their full-length debut. Producer – although Albini would later take umbrage at that title – and band met over coffee, and the sessions began the next day. Emerging from

THE PURPLE ONE

The self-released *Pixies* cassette collection, known by fans as *The Purple Tape*, is exceptionally rare. Recorded in March 1987 at Fort Apache Studios for a reported $1,000, it contained 17 songs, including *Here Comes Your Man*, *Broken Face*, *Nimrod's Son* and *The Holiday Song*. Eight of these early compositions went on to make up *Come On Pilgrim*. In the book *Fool The World*, Gary Smith recalls ordering 500 copies of the demo to send to record companies. A vinyl version was released in 2002 on spinART Records, containing the nine songs that didn't make it onto *Come On Pilgrim*. Copies currently fetch £25 to £40 on Discogs. A further release followed in Europe, in 2010, on Cooking Vinyl.

"IT WAS A PERFECT FIT. 4AD WAS NOT ALL ABOUT THE KIND OF MAINSTREAM POPULAR MUSIC THAT MTV HAD BECOME"

Tom Sheehan



the sewage-coated squalor of their Kenmore Square rehearsal room, the Pixies hit Q Division at a gallop, the 13 songs that would make up *Surfer Rosa* already sharpened to taught, burnished alt-rock perfection.

"We were pretty excited," says Francis. "I was excited the second that I woke up, and we were just really happy to be doing this thing we'd set out to do. It was like, 'oh, this is what it's like, you work with these people who've come from out of town…'"

"It was very quick," says Santiago of the sessions, which were completed in 10 days, with a budget of $10,000 – Albini taking a flat fee of $1,500. "Just because of the way we were, tick-tock, we gotta go, we don't have that much time. We were really well rehearsed, we were ready for that album. We didn't have any sort of pre-production on it. The first time I'd heard of pre-production was working with Gil Norton on *Doolittle*. We met Steve Albini at a coffee shop and that was it, we were in the next day. We were excited to get the Pixies on the map. We had the material ready to record, everything was written, way down the road. People were already excited about it – the people we played the material to, live – so it just had to get captured in an exciting sense, and Albini was a pretty damn good choice."

STUDIO EXPERIMENTS

Inside Q Division, the famously downbeat producer set about applying his 'anti human' sonic adornments to the already fully formed songs he would later describe as "blandly entertaining college rock". Francis, Deal and Santiago were encouraged to use metal plectrums; Francis' voice was shot through a guitar distortion pedal to frightening effect on the frantic *Something Against You*, eliciting the singer's delighted response of "I am one happy prick!". Meanwhile, Albini utilised every inch of the studio, preferring the natural ambience of small rooms to digital reverb, with Deal's *Gigantic* and *Where Is My Mind?* vocals recorded in the bathroom.

Deal's then-husband, John Murphy, has said of the sessions: "I remember them taking the amps down to the bathroom so they could record the large, large sound for *Gigantic*. Albini didn't like the studio sound, so they took all the Marshalls down to this bathroom, which was completely made out of cement, and that's where that big, echoey sound comes out of it."

Santiago, who commandeered Deal's Gibson Les Paul Goldtop to carve out the lacerating, angular riffs on songs such as *Where Is My Mind?* and *Bone Machine* (while Francis played a blonde Fender American Standard Telecaster), recalls: "The flashes of memory I have are being in a little side room, not the main room, with my little Peavey amp, and I remember him sticking these little microphones in it with a little roach clip.

"I remember doing *Vamos* and throwing things at the guitar, I want to say they were tennis balls… I just didn't want to have anything to do with a big, big, big solo, probably because I couldn't handle it [laughs]. My take on it was that mainstream guitar had a lot of typewriting skills. They were typing as fast as they could, and I couldn't hear it. The only thing that was impressive about it for me was the speed – how can they play so fast? But in the back of my mind, I was like, 'I really don't care'. It just wasn't my thing. I'm more like a classic-rock guy. You gotta hear some riffs or something you're going to remember, and that requires less notes."

CHANNEL SURFING

For Francis, too, the songs on *Surfer Rosa* were about allying themselves to a new counter-culture movement, rejecting the lazy indulgence epitomised by the bands Pixies watched on MTV, a channel that had begun the slide away from its initial "Ladies and gentlemen, rock 'n' roll" ideal towards a more sanitised reflection of mass culture. "It was conscious, but I don't know ▶

At the time of *Surfer Rosa*, says Francis: "It was a very upbeat dynamic, not weighed down by any bad blood"

THE STORY BEHIND THE SLEEVE

Vaughan Oliver and Simon Larbalestier tell *Long Live Vinyl* how they created the dark, surreal sleeve art to mirror the Pixies' music…

The *Surfer Rosa* and *Come On Pilgrim* sleeves were directed by 4AD artist-in-residence Vaughan Oliver, who had discovered Simon Larbalestier's photography after the pair had studied at the same college in Newcastle, before Larbalestier went on to the Royal College Of Art in London.

Oliver was searching for an image for the *Come On Pilgrim* sleeve when he came across Larbalestier's now-infamous 'hairy back' shot in his studio.

"As with all of the photographers that would come through the studio, somebody would strike me, but I would have to wait sometimes two or three years for a project to come up. Simon's work wouldn't have fitted the Cocteau Twins or Colourbox, but Pixies? Yes – bang on! So there it was, the answer to the problem on his wall – this man with a hairy back who was at once both natural but unnatural. There's something slightly surreal there, something slightly dark and an element of dark humour.

"There's a neuroticism in Pixies' music that comes through in the jarred guitar that I was trying to emulate or echo in the handwritten stuff on the cover. That's generally our philosophy: I'm not trying to define the music, I'm trying to suggest an atmosphere that is about the music."

For the *Surfer Rosa* sleeve, the pair started from scratch – with input from the band. As Francis tells *Long Live Vinyl*, the designer nailed the brief, recreating both the Puerto-Rican bars the singer began to conceive the *Surfer Rosa* lyrics in and the dark worlds he evoked.

"It had some kind of energy and the flavour of everything I'd distilled from my experience there, a somewhat sexualised culture, a colonial Spanish patina, Catholicism, really sensual. He called me a couple of times, and we talked and I read him some lyrics – some of my poor Spanish lyrics. This kind of Spanish flamenco dancer, topless with her hair tied up in a bun, it was all super-sexual, but at the same time, kind of formalised. That's pretty sexy, when you think about a person looking free and in the nude but at the same time, in formality. The concept of erotic, sexual freedom, mixed in with this kind of formality… it's almost fetishy. I liked it. A 22-year-old dude… this is great!"

"*Surfer Rosa* was a kind of weak conceptual link," says Oliver. "Charles was writing these songs in Spanish and I'm just thinking, 'what

Vaughan Oliver chanced upon photographer Simon Larbalestier's iconic shot for the *Come On Pilgrim* cover

Below, facing page: The new *Come On Pilgrim… It's Surfer Rosa* artwork shows the continuity between the two covers

are the most traditional aspects of Spanish culture, not necessarily Puerto Rican?' so I could put these Spanish lyrics on the front and show a Spanish tradition but debase it; that was the idea of the flamenco dancer and her topless aspect, and showing a little degree of Catholic remorse on the back.

Oliver and Larbalestier mocked up a Spanish bar backdrop in a pub across the street from 4AD's office in London

"THE CONCEPT OF EROTIC, SEXUAL FREEDOM, MIXED IN WITH THIS KIND OF FORMALITY... IT'S ALMOST FETISHY"

"All of this stuff was low-budget and we shot it in a room above the pub opposite the 4AD office. I had a friend who knew a girl who was a flamenco dancer and we built the backdrop, which was trying to recreate a Spanish bar.

"It's so funny, I show that to students today – I do a lot of teaching – and the students will say: 'What layer is that on, Mr Oliver?' And I say: 'It's a fucking photograph!'."

While Larbalestier remains tight-lipped about the identity of the hirsute model on *Come On Pilgrim* and the dancer on *Surfer Rosa*, he has clear memories of the shoot for the latter sleeve.

"I remember Vaughan mentioning creating the feeling of an old Spanish bar inhabited by topless flamenco-style dancers – bars where Charles would sit in to write his songs. The Catholic themes were already part of my own interest, from work I was making in Europe involving Greek Orthodox churches. The addition of the fish was an in-joke, as it linked to the image of the hirsute man on *Come On Pilgrim*. Chris Bigg found me a nice big cod fresh from a London fish market to photograph. It added a dark humour to the series, which was central to the music, we felt."

THEN COD IS SEVEN

"It was freezing cold, and the Polaroid film that I was shooting with was taking much longer to develop and began to semi-solarise. It was also one of the few times that I worked with electronic flash units, which I hate because I always like to work with available natural light.

"It was also a team effort and a new experience for me, given that I like to work entirely solo. Everybody enjoyed the day."

Oliver reserves his biggest compliment for Larbalestier, saying: "Simon gauged the atmosphere and for all of their stuff, I just thought he was a fifth Pixie. He's an ideal person to turn to, to visualise their music."

"At the time, it was very flattering – a huge compliment," says Larbalestier, "and had I been based in the USA then perhaps we might have forged some kind of kindred friendship. However, sadly, I don't see any relationship visually with their current output of music. But that wasn't my choice – it was made for me."

"I'd like to think the music and artwork haven't dated," says Oliver, "because we've always worked outside of time. We weren't doing anything that was on-trend: the idea was to stand out rather than join in, to do our own thing. I think what's happened with time, in the same way as 4AD's music, it has led to genres – in the same way that the artwork inspired people to work in that style."

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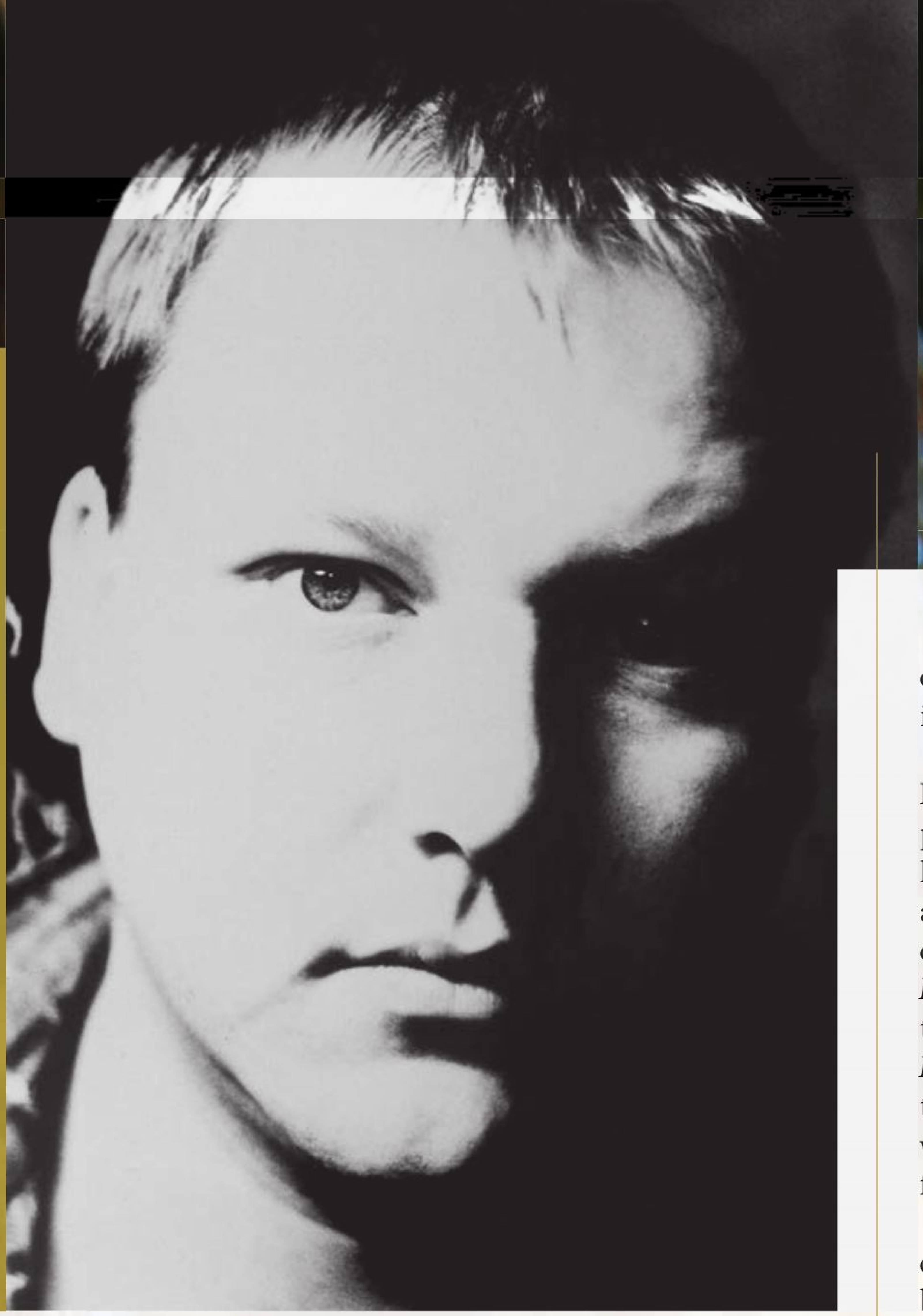


Andrew Catlin

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID COME ON PILGRIM

***NME*, Jack Barron**
"These tales of dark lands and deeds are illuminated by smiling tunes veined with quick-silver flashes of guitar. It's this sleight-of-hand, together with a morbid humour which surfaces slowly upon repeated plays, that makes Pixies so addictive."

***Reflex*, Jay Blotcher**
"The Pixies have the eerie depth of old souls, yet their average age of 22 explains their eagerness to offend, to aurally jar and generally rock people off their mental axis."

"THE MUSIC IS UNCONVENTIONAL. THERE'S A LOT OF HALF-STEPS, CHORDS THAT DON'T THEORETICALLY GO WITH THE KEY, BUT IT SEEMS TO WORK"

if it became conscious when we picked up our guitars," he says. "It was more going to see bands, and recognising they were either on this side of the line or that side. A lot of the mainstream music seemed like it was trying to go there, it wanted success. To us, that type of mediocrity and flashy lame shtick wasn't cool. Then there was stuff on the other side of the line – cool bands, they weren't being flashy or trying to pander to some kind of audience, they were full-on, 'fuck you guys'. There wasn't an atmosphere of appeasement, there was an atmosphere of FUCK. YOU. Not necessarily trying to be confrontational, but this is what we do, if you don't like it, fuck off, I don't care.

"We were inspired by this kind of attitude of Us Versus Them. Our absorption of that attitude, mixed in with the fact that we were pretty rough-and-ready players, completely naïve, but completely willing to try, it all came very naturally. Even some of our songs that may have a toppy edge to them, a light edge – *Here Comes Your Man*, or *Where Is My Mind?* – that was clearly on the artsy side of the fence. All you had to do was listen to the lyrics… Oh yeah, you're not going to hear this on the radio!"

TABOO SUBJECTS

Those lyrics, which were inspired by Francis' exchange trip to Puerto Rico and influenced by the early work of David Lynch, landed in the popular musical landscape like an incendiary grenade. The vivid sexual imagery, incest and howled fire and brimstone of a writer whose family joined the Pentecostal church when he was 12 crashed into a subversive examination of Catholicism, a series of potent metaphors for the individual's own inner turmoil.

On *Cactus*, covered by David Bowie on 2002 album *Heathen*, the protagonist is found pleading with his love interest to cut herself up on a cactus and send him the bloody dress in the mail. On *Break My Body*, he's "the horny loser, crashing through my mother's door" and on *Broken Face*, there's "This boy who had two children with his sisters… who were his daughters… who were his favourite lovers".

Such overt references to incest challenged a taboo that had rarely been addressed in popular music, and Francis smashed through it, screaming and yelping with relish. And then there was the perfect collision with Deal's infectious basslines, poetic romance and sweet hushed nothings on *Gigantic*, which Cobain described as "the best Pixies song, and Kim wrote it".

"Charles' screaming with a sweet female voice underneath it, it's a good contrast," says Santiago. "I think it's great [Francis' writing], I think it's bizarre. I knew he was going to be moving into that direction when *Debaser* was going to be called '[Shed,] Appolonia', and then he just said: 'Nah, come on, it's too typical, singing about a girl, all that kind of stuff', and he started singing about a Dalí film [*Un Chien Andalou*] and slicing up eyeballs."

MUSICAL BOND

Santiago says the dynamic with his old University Of Massachusetts roommate was a natural one, lending itself to songs that shifted time signature and tempo at will and treated musical orthodoxy with contempt. "It's pretty amazing, because I always wanted to meet someone who wrote songs from outside the box. I got lucky when we met at UMass.

Above: Black Francis' lyrics were macabre, taboo and surreal in almost equal measure

WHAT THE CRITICS SAID
SURFER ROSA

***NME*, Mark Sinker**
"*Gigantic* sounds like Rickie Lee Jones guesting with Pere Ubu to me. They writhe through The Band and Crazy Horse and (especially) The Fall as if they can hear some kind of history which links them all. They do more than sound like people who went before them – they force the past to sound like them… Rock America has given up on Like-Me-Like-Me populism, and some of us are beginning to love it as a result. As they say to themselves: Oh my golly! Oh my golly! Rosa, oh oh ohh Rosa! Huh! Huh! Rosa, oh oh ohh Rosa! Huh Huh!"

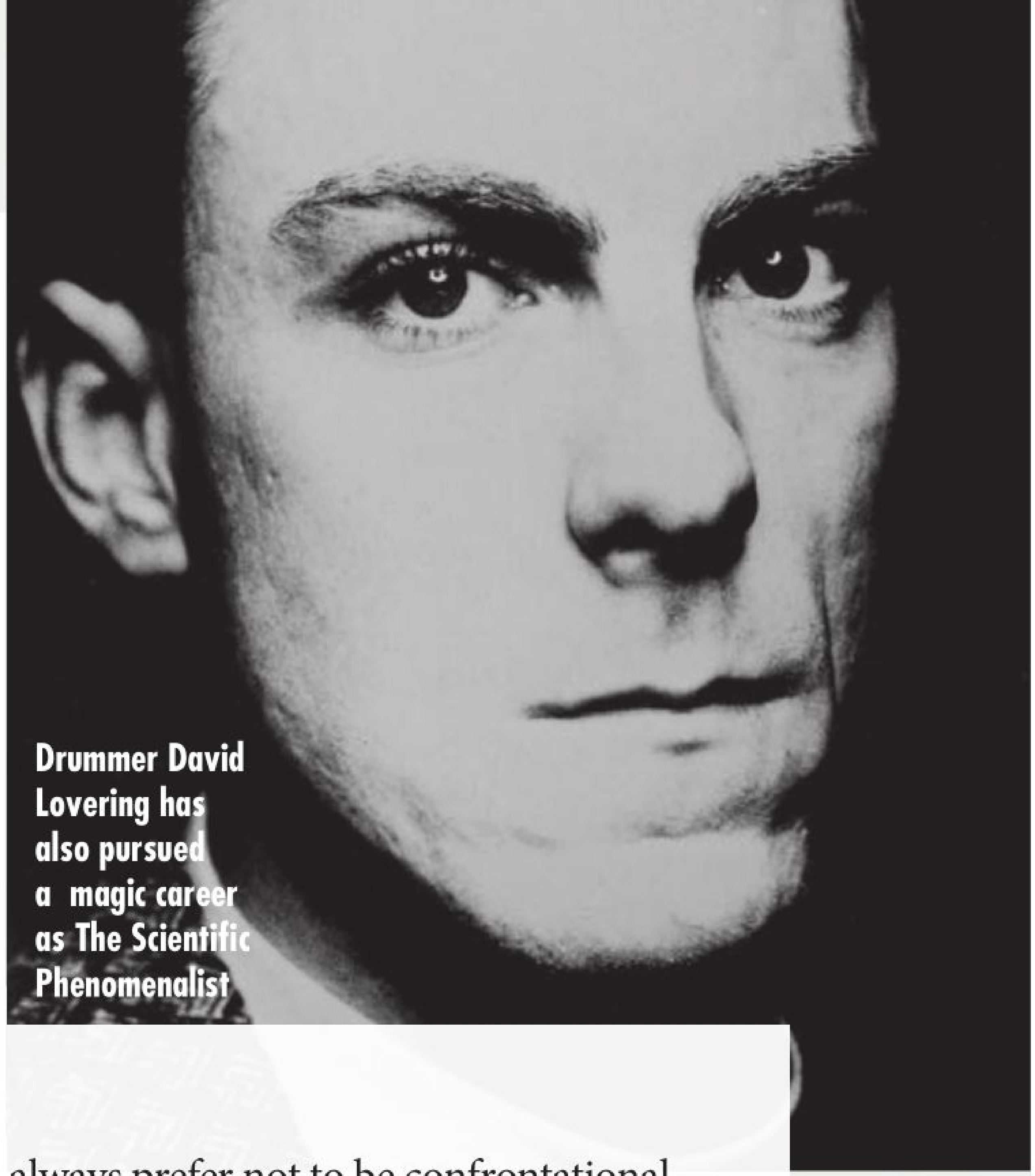
***Q*, Ian Cranna**
"What sets the Pixies apart are their sudden burst of memorable pure pop melody and an intuitive understanding of song dynamics that makes for positive enjoyment. The 13 tracks have short, uncomfortable titles but lyrics that go beyond the usual black nihilism into personal enigma and, I'd swear, a sense of fun. Not gelling their act together is almost certainly part of the whole point of Pixies, but if they're not careful, they could have a bright future in front of them."

I went to UMass knowing I wanted to be in a band. I tried in high school, but don't have the discipline to learn other people's songs. It didn't interest me, I'd rather make stuff up.

"The music is unconventional. There's a lot of half-steps, a lot of chords that don't theoretically go with the key, but it seems to work. We knock off two beats here on some line and not necessarily go four, so we have all these twists and turns. After a while, it got second nature to us – not counting verses in four, with chunks of four, we'd have chunks of three a lot of the time. Then we'd be like: 'This is the weird one'. 'Why's it weird?' – 'Because it's a chunk of four. Watch out, this is the normal one!'."

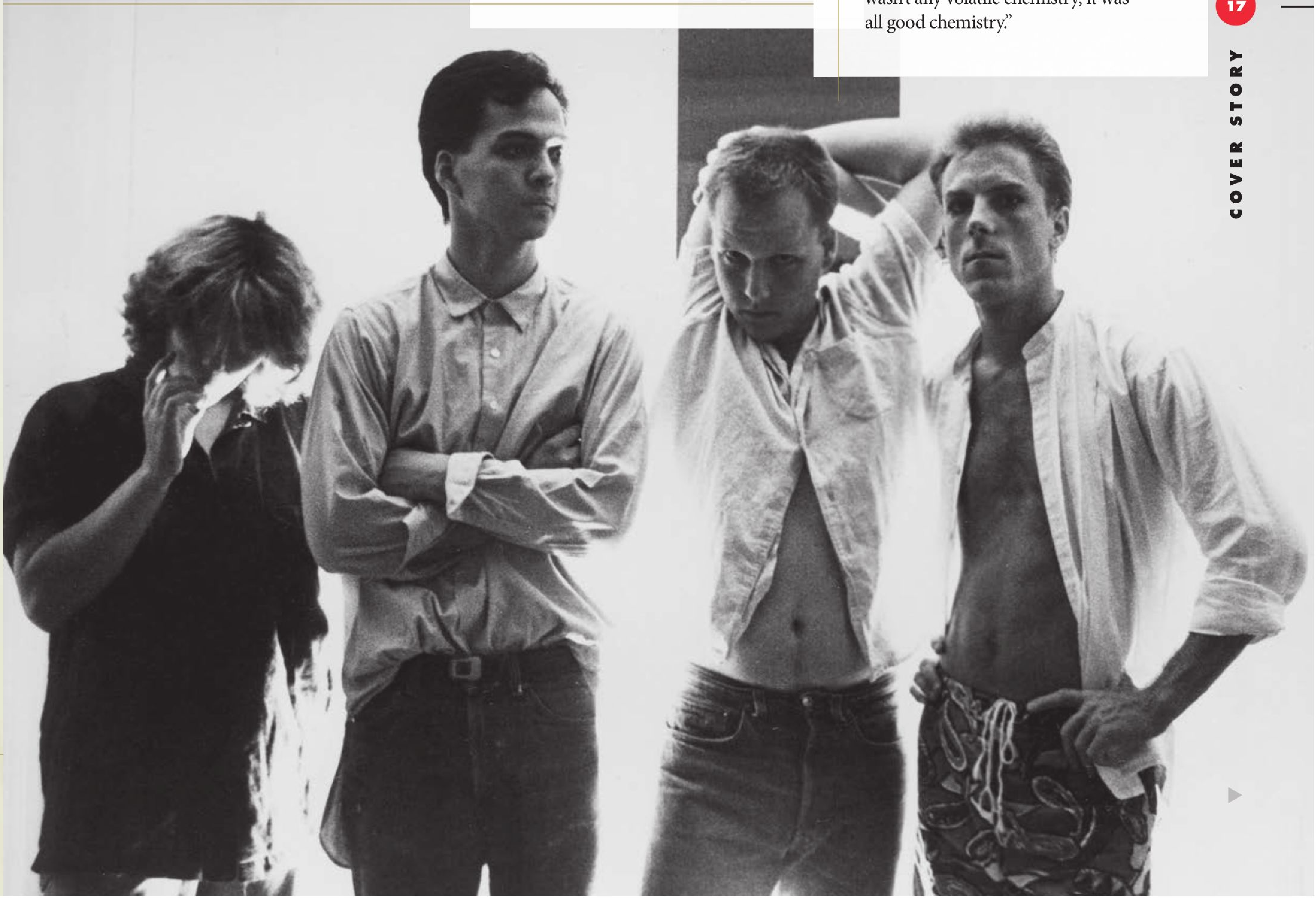
"Joey and I had a bond, the same bond we share today," says Francis. "To this day, we both still confuse each other. We might know each other really well, but I don't know if we really understand each other. We were bonding over this idea of starting a band, and you just kind of get on with it. For Joey and I, that dynamic has been there since we were 18 – it's still exactly the same. With the Pixies, we always prefer not to be confrontational with each other.

"With Kim, it was the same deal – I don't know if she understood what I was about, I didn't understand what she was all about necessarily, but we shared the same passion of 'isn't music cool? Isn't music amazing?'. That was enough to declare us – we're a band, we're playing a show on Friday night, we'll represent this idea of original music by an original band. It was a very upbeat dynamic, not weighed down by any bad blood. We didn't have any of that at that point, there wasn't any volatile chemistry, it was all good chemistry."



Drummer David Lovering has also pursued a magic career as The Scientific Phenomenalist

Andrew Caitlin



"BLANDLY ENTERTAINING COLLEGE ROCK..."

Albini delivers his verdict

Amid all of the superlative reviews of *Surfer Rosa*, one dissenting voice remained – that of producer Steve Albini. Writing in *Forced Exposure* fanzine in 1991, he called *Surfer Rosa*: "A patchwork pinch loaf from a band who at their top-dollar best are blandly entertaining college rock. Their willingness to be 'guided' by their manager, their record company and their producers is unparalleled. Never have I seen four cows more anxious to be led around by their nose rings..."

Later, he was more contrite, stating in an interview: "I said some unflattering things about the band in a fanzine and to this day, I regret having done it. I think making that Pixies record was one of the formative experiences of my professional attitude and I think I indulged a selfish part of my personality during the making of that record. I don't think I regarded the band as significantly as I should have."

Albini was unhappy at being credited on the album's sleeve as 'producer and engineer'. Francis remembers: "We thought he was the producer, I think there was a misunderstanding and later on he felt he'd been manipulated by the record company. Apparently, they had some sort of prior agreement that he was being hired as an engineer, not a producer.

"He probably didn't want to produce anything unless it met with his values. An outsider coming into the Pixies for the first time, you're not going to understand immediately what our values are – are these guys cool? Are they a bunch of dorks? Steve Albini couldn't quite tell.

"We liked working with Steve Albini, he had a lot of cool instincts, he definitely had a fuck-you attitude. He brought too much of that, from a social point of view. Having a coffee with him at the diner was a fucking nightmare... He'd be sitting there being fairly offensive with truck drivers and little old ladies who'd seen 10 times as much shit in their lives as he had, and there he was, flying the flag of antagonisation. Dude, chill the fuck out here, it's eight in the morning, we're just drinking coffee, we don't need to offend these people – they're on our side...

"We've basically kissed and made up many years ago, but these events are still kind of alive in my heart. I was so enthusiastic about that moment in our career, that was such a special moment, the thing had not soured. But that was the first real sour taste I got. That was my first disappointment and it came from a surprising corner. It probably made me a little more cynical."

Vaughan Oliver says the back cover of *Surfer Rosa* attempted to convey "a little degree of Catholic remorse"

From the moment Francis and Santiago formed Pixies – Santiago picking the name from a dictionary – then advertised for a bassist who liked Peter, Paul & Mary and Hüsker Dü, to recording *The Purple Tape*, signing to 4AD, making *Surfer Rosa* and embarking on their first European tour, before recording the follow-up *Doolittle*, was a period of just three years. In the foreword to the book *Fool The World: An Oral History Of A Band Called Pixies*, Chas Banks, the band's European tour manager, says: "It wasn't a rollercoaster ride; there weren't enough downs for that to work as a metaphor. It was more like a volcano exploding, or a huge storm. The Pixies' ascendancy was nothing less than a force of nature: unstoppable and relentless."

"It was strange coming out on stage and people were applauding," Deal has said of the UK shows that followed *Surfer Rosa*. "Fucking pissed me off. Why are they applauding? We haven't even played yet. We were doing the bar thing in Boston so much, and so used to nobody ever knowing us."

"I had nothing to base it on," Santiago tells *Long Live Vinyl*. "I could tell we did it pretty fast, and we got a great break, but I just thought, 'this is the way it's supposed to happen.' I knew we got lucky, because we rehearsed in a building where there were a bunch of other bands, and we got out of there really fast. It was a dingy rock space with sewage coming in, and it was nice to get the hell out of there. It happened fast, but we worked a lot for it. We were a 9-to-5 band. We didn't party around, we just went in there and banged it out."

Released in the UK in March 1988, *Surfer Rosa* was available in Pixies' home country only as an import for nearly six months, before Rough Trade began distributing it in North America – initially bundled with *Come On Pilgrim*. Elektra later picked up the US distribution. In the UK, its popularity grew quickly, with *Melody Maker* and *Sounds* naming it their Album Of The Year. It took until 2005 to go Gold in the States, and by 2015 had sold around 700,000 copies there.

RAW POWER

Ivo Watts-Russell reported: "The response to *Surfer Rosa* was times five [that of *Come On Pilgrim*]. The time between the first two was so short, it was all just this mushrooming thing. Nothing but positive feedback.

"I remember when I first heard *Surfer Rosa*, thinking I didn't know the Pixies could sound like The Fall. That was my immediate reaction, in other words, incredibly raw."

So, 30 years on, what is the legacy of this uncomfortable, shadowy thrill ride of a record that has somehow avoided the ravages of age?

"It's very good," says Santiago, laughing. "It sounds timeless. There's no bullshit or gimmicks on it and it sounds like four kids doing the best they can. We're doing what we

"IT WASN'T A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE... IT WAS MORE LIKE A VOLCANO EXPLODING, OR A HUGE STORM"

love and it's been like that for so long. *Surfer Rosa*'s 30 years old and everything's paid off from all that hard work. We're one of the lucky few who can keep doing this after all that time."

NO PIXIES, NO NIRVANA?

Kurt Cobain had just formed Nirvana when *Surfer Rosa* was released, and he adored the record, crediting Pixies as the blueprint for his band's own quiet-loud dynamic and recruiting Steve Albini to record *In Utero*. "I was trying to write the ultimate pop song, I was basically trying to rip off the Pixies," he said. "I have to admit it. When I heard the Pixies for the first time, I connected with that band so heavily I should have been in that band – or at least in a Pixies cover band. We used their sense of dynamics, being soft and quiet and then loud and hard."

PJ Harvey, too, made a beeline to Albini's door. Thom Yorke said Radiohead following Pixies live at Coachella in 2004 would be like being supported by The Beatles. David Bowie was also hugely enamoured, saying: "The first time I heard Pixies was around 1988. I found it just about the most compelling music outside of Sonic Youth in the entire 80s. The interesting juxtapositions that Charles brought together of quite sordid material, at times… the permutations he created with the subjects he dealt with were so unusual that it caught my ear immediately.

"It's a cliché, but somebody once said that The Velvet Underground didn't sell very many albums, but everyone that bought a Velvet Underground album formed a band. I have to suggest that the same thing applied to the Pixies. Once you heard them, you wanted to have a band just like them."

Francis pauses, then balks at the lofty pretensions attached to the word 'legacy' when we run that stellar list of supporters past him. "I can't really speak to the legacy of it, because it's my record," he says. "I'm glad it worked out and those people found the record inspiring, I'm very happy about that. But even 30 years later, it's almost like I can't presume any kind of status. To me, I'm just kind of in the band, I have a gig tonight, so I'm still kind of in the same racket. While I'm very pleased the 'product' has a good shelf life, it may just be my uptight New England soul that doesn't want to get too emotional about it… I'm not saying we came from poverty, but we definitely come from a working-class blue-collar ethic – just gotta do the job, we've gotta do the gig, we've gotta practise our new songs so they don't suck so much… as opposed to [adopts posh voice] 'We are The Great Pixies'. We'll bask in the glow when we've played a show and the audience claps. That's our one moment to feel it."

JOEY BELIEVES

"That's where the band's focus is," Francis continues. "It's very in the moment… It's all one big tour, one big record. We get to be in a band. That's our distinction, and we're proud of that, but it's very work-oriented.

"It's not that we don't delve into memories, but we don't sit around and have a big old chat. If we do, it's more Pixie-esque humour. Joking around about stuff, especially with someone like Joey Santiago. Joey named the Pixies! He's the one guy who keeps reminding us: 'Remember we're called the Pixies, and you know what the nature of Pixies are… Pixies play practical jokes, Pixies run off into the bushes and hide.' That's where Joey's at. Joey *believes*. Pixies are in the moment, they're not like [adopting faux academic voice] 'let's discuss the legacy of the band'. As Pixies, we kind of had to lose a little bit of our human side and adopt this other species – these little people that live in the forest. People in other places believe in this stuff wholeheartedly, and I'm almost inclined to think maybe there's some weird shit like that going on with this band, and we're loyal to that…" ●

Joey Santiago says of *Surfer Rosa*: "It sounds timeless… There's no bullshit or gimmicks on it"

Andrew Catlin

PIXIES

Black Francis at the Paradiso in Amsterdam in 1988

Classic Album
PRIMAL SCREAM
SCREAMADELICA

Tired of being seen as indie also-rans, Primal Scream embraced club culture, fused rock and rave and rewrote the rock 'n' roll rulebook, establishing themselves as a band with style and a whole lot of substance…

Getty

The late 80s were a bleak and frustrating time for Primal Scream. Their self-titled second LP had been a disappointment; feeling that they lacked direction, Creation boss Alan McGee booked them on a tour of "any shithole that would have them". Jokingly dubbed the 'Tear Up The Atlas' tour, the jaunt saw them play tiny venues in far-flung corners of the UK – but crucially, during the tour, the band met DJ Andrew Weatherall.

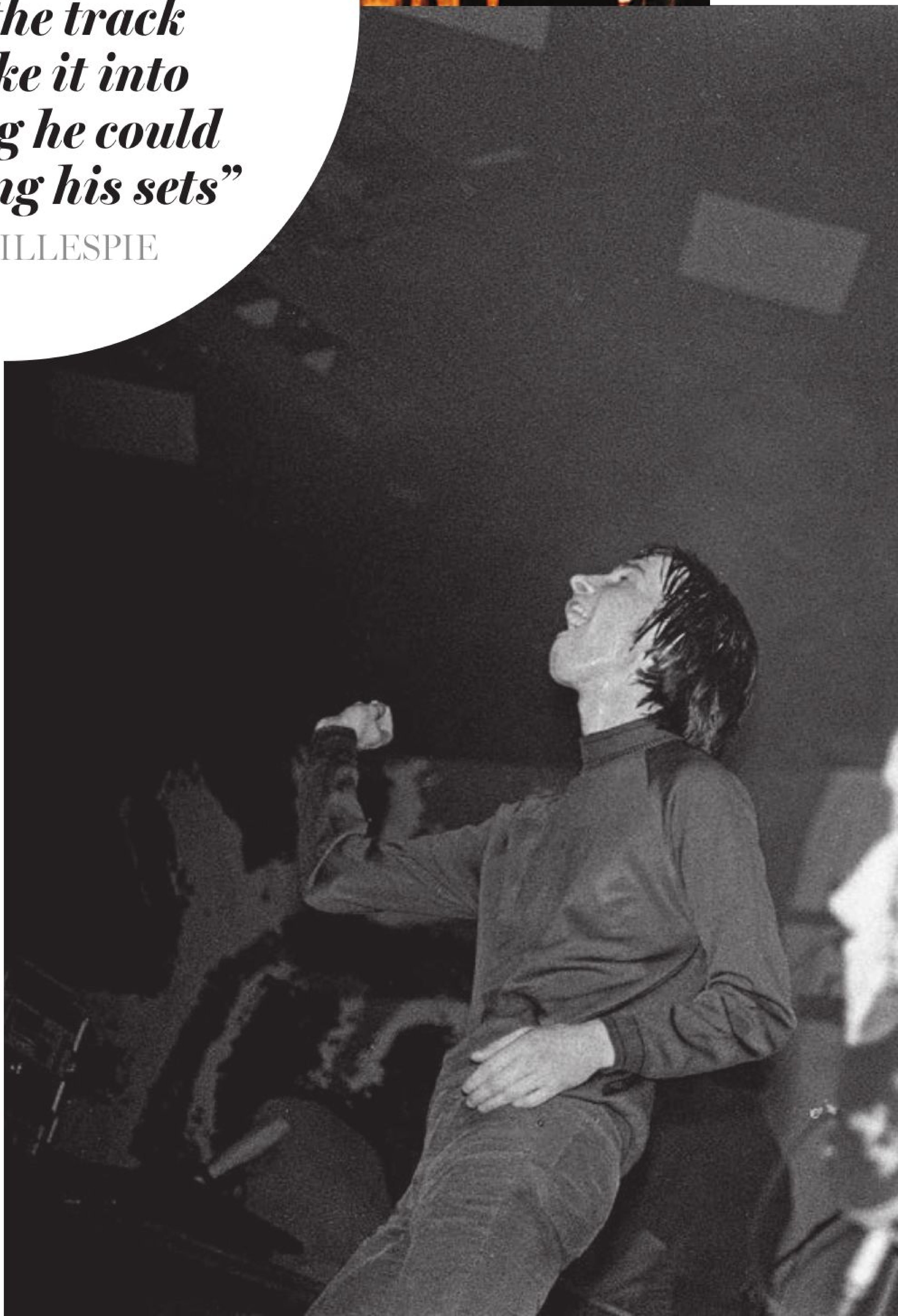
"I didn't know much about them, I only knew the odd track," Weatherall recalled. "I'd been asked by Helen Maud, the live editor of the *NME*, to review one of their gigs and thought they were great, so I gave them a rave review. We met again a couple of weeks later in Heaven, and I got to know them and they asked if I wanted to have a go at remixing one of their tracks."

Although Weatherall was a successful and influential club DJ, he admits that he was daunted at the prospect. "I'd only been in the studio a couple of times and was a bit hesitant at first," he said. "I knew what I wanted to do with *I'm Losing More Than I'll Ever Have*, but I didn't want to offend them by stripping away the vocal and stuff. So I did a version and thought it was okay, but when I played it for them they looked disappointed and said: 'We wanted it more screwed up than that. Do what you like. Don't worry about us.' So I went back and did what became *Loaded*."

"I loved what he had done with it," Gillespie told Absolute Radio in 2011. "I was blown away. I'd grown up with the disco extended 12" mixes and I loved dub versions where Scientist or Errol T or King Tubby would take the vocal

> ***"Loaded was a dub version of our song. We wanted Andy to take the track and make it into something he could play during his sets"***
> BOBBY GILLESPIE

Above (l to r): Robert Young, Andrew Innes and Bobby Gillespie, who penned all but one track on *Screamadelica*



reggae track and strip it back, or make it instrumental and add odd noises and samples, and to me, that's what *Loaded* was. It was a dub version of our song. We wanted Andy to take the track and make it into something he could play during his sets. It was an experiment and I loved the result."

SLIP INSIDE THIS HOUSE CLUB

The following weekend, Weatherall dropped *Loaded* during his set at London's Subterranea to a rapturous reception. Until now, the band had been known for punky garage rock influenced by The Stooges, New York Dolls and the MC5, but having been introduced by Alan McGee to the pills and thrills associated with a Happy Mondays gig, ecstasy and acid house, Gillespie's musical horizons were expanded.

"At first, I wasn't really into the music, but I did like the drug," he said. "I was living in Brighton at the time, and Alan McGee moved into the flat above me and he had a lot of parties, so he wore me down with the music – import 12" singles by the likes of Frankie Knuckles, and *Voodoo Ray* by A Guy Called Gerald. My girlfriend was really into it, so I started going out on the acid-house scene and it became really exciting – way more exciting than rock gigs."

Having scored their first Top 20 hit with *Loaded*, a follow-up was required. Set on capturing the rush and euphoria of acid house on record, the new altered-state Primal Scream holed up in a studio in Hackney to indulge themselves in a period of experimentation void of rules and boundaries. Writing on keyboards instead of guitars and using an S1000

Bobby Gillespie and Robert Young playing Glasgow's Barrowlands

Getty

The songs

Personnel

Bobby Gillespie vocals
Andrew Innes guitars
Robert Young guitar, vocals
Martin Duffy keys, piano
Henry Olsen bass, guitar
Jah Wobble bass
Phillip Tomanov drums, percussion
Denise Johnson vocals
Jimmy Miller, The Orb, Hypnotone, Andrew Weatherall, Hugo Nicolson, Terry Farley production

1 *MOVIN' ON UP*

Beginning life as a bare piano and vocal ballad inspired by blues and gospel, *Movin' On Up* grew into a Rolling Stones-inspired anthem. The catalyst, a Bo Diddley intro riff from Andrew Innes, led the band to add guitars and a choir on the chorus, as they felt Gillespie's voice was too soft to convey the song's uplifting message. The song gave the band the chance to work with producer Jimmy Miller and was released as the final *Screamadelica* single as the lead track on the *Dixie-Narco* EP in 1992 (No. 11 in the UK).

2 *SLIP INSIDE THIS HOUSE*

The only song on *Screamadelica* not written by the band, *Slip Inside This House* is a cover of a song by 60s psyche purveyors The 13th Floor Elevators. On the day of recording, a worse-for-wear Bobby was unable to sing it, so guitarist Robert Young stepped up instead.

3 *DON'T FIGHT IT, FEEL IT*

One of the most straightforward club songs on the LP, and the biggest crossover onto the dance scene, was inspired by The Ronettes and Phil Spector's Wall Of Sound. The band enlisted Denise Johnson to contribute the soulful vocal. Bobby has described the song as "Andrew Weatherall's masterpiece", claiming "it is the sound of rushing on ecstasy".

4 *HIGHER THAN THE SUN*

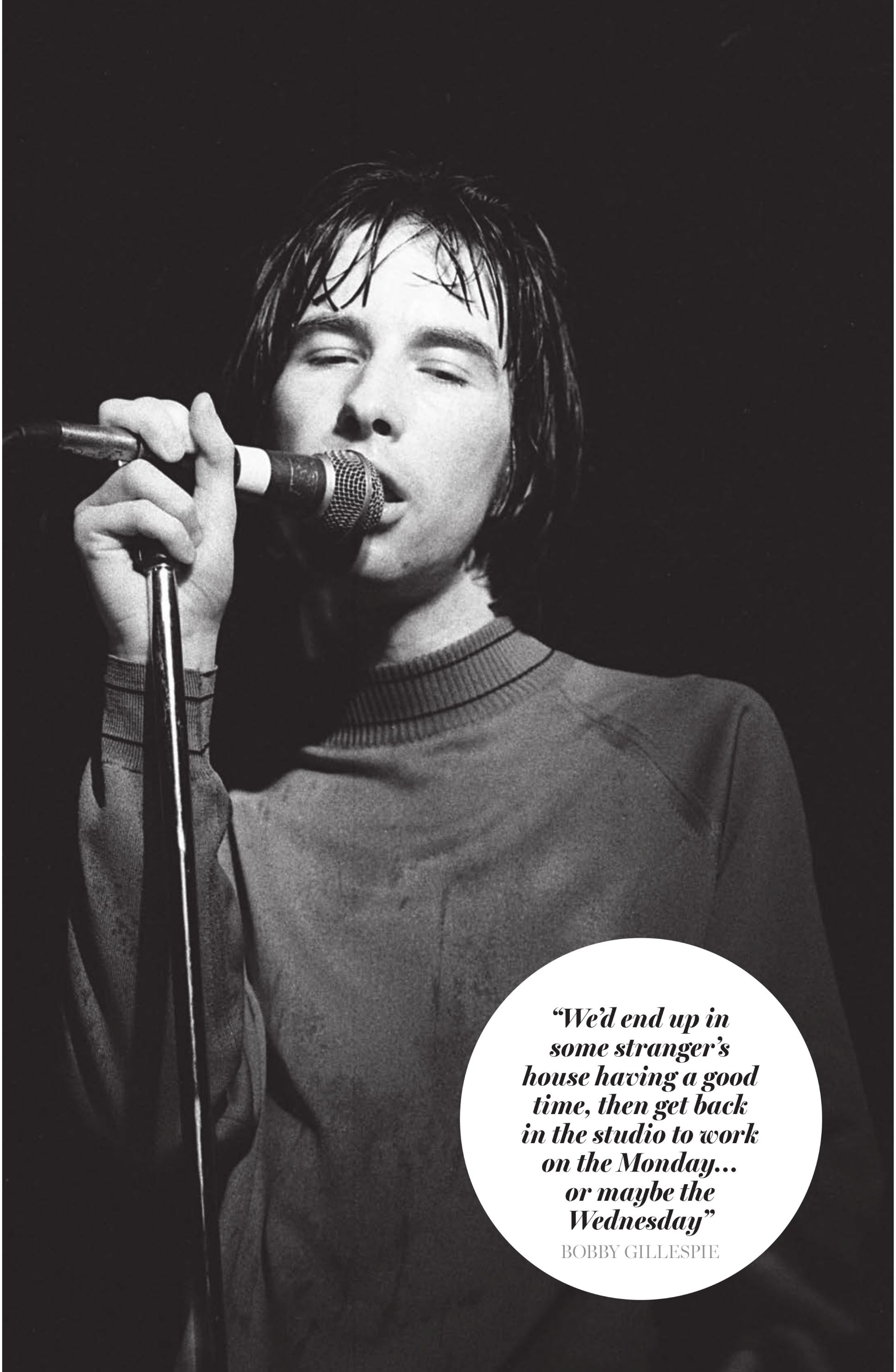
Described by Creation boss Alan McGee as "a genius hymn to drugs" and by Bobby Gillespie as "the most important record since *Anarchy In The UK*", this epic, sprawling piece was inspired by The Orb's *Little Fluffy Clouds*. Alex Paterson describes it as "the best thing I've ever done". Although the song originally clocked in at almost seven minutes long, Andrew Weatherall decided that an edit should be included on the album to work better with the sequencing, as it was followed by another mellow track, *Inner Flight*.

5 *INNER FLIGHT*

Eschewing the idea that just because a band had a drummer, a guitarist and a bassist all of those elements had to be on every song, *Inner Flight* was Primal Scream utilising the advances in technology, in this case the S1000 sampler. The band wanted a trippy, more synthetic sound and decided to use the sampler for the flute sound, a process which sound engineer Hugo Nicolson took days to perfect. The song ends with a sample of Brian Eno's *The Great Pretender*.

6 *COME TOGETHER*

The sound of summer 1990, *Come Together* encapsulates the peace, love and drugs of the rave generation. Written



"We'd end up in some stranger's house having a good time, then get back in the studio to work on the Monday... or maybe the Wednesday"

BOBBY GILLESPIE

Getty

sampler freed them from a traditional verse-chorus-verse song structure. The result was *Come Together* – the sound of summer 1990. "We never did ecstasy in the studio," Gillespie told the BBC's *Classic Albums* programme in 2011, "but the record came out of the experience of being involved in the acid scene and doing ecstasy. We'd find out where Andy was DJing, hire a car, and go off partying, listen to what was going on, end up in some stranger's house having a good time, then get back in the studio to work on the Monday… or maybe on the Wednesday!"

HIGHER THAN THE SUN

With weekenders often lasting four or five days, their partying was way more prevalent than their output, and McGee was forced to intervene to get the band to work on an actual LP, as opposed to an intermittent stream of singles.

Once the band established their focus, the album came together quickly. The unifying spirit of raves infiltrated the recording, resulting in jams with everyone working to produce the best record possible, and egos checked at the door. If someone wasn't available to play their part or someone thought they could do something better, it was encouraged (hence the lack of band credits). The only fixed roles were those of songwriters, with Gillespie, Innes and Young penning everything except *Slip Inside This House*.

Although critics heralded the production of Andrew Weatherall, Hugo Nicolson and Terry Farley, Weatherall has

Gillespie shows off his record collection, with Jimmy Cliff's *The Harder They Come* soundtrack taking pride of place, in 1990

Getty

The songs *continued*

after the band had been to clubs such as Shoom and Spectrum, the song, with its laid-back groove, samples of inspirational Jesse Jackson speeches, myriad sound effects and gospel refrain of "come together as one" was the sound of Primal Scream embracing the realisation that a song could be built solely around a riff or a vocal hook, and needn't follow any structure.

7 *LOADED*

A remix of *I'm Losing More Than I'll Ever Have* from the band's self-titled second album, *Loaded* was the first collaboration with Andrew Weatherall and the impetus for the acid-rock direction of *Screamadelica*. The infamous sample of Peter Fonda saying: "We want to be free… We want to get loaded" was taken from the dialogue of the 1966 film *The Wild Angels*. The song reached No. 16 in the charts, giving the band their first Top 20 hit.

8 *DAMAGED*

Although *Screamadelica* is lauded for its uplifting anthems, there's a lot of heart amongst the hedonism, and *Damaged* is the album's most tender moment. It was recorded live in one take, with the guitar solo added by Henry Olsen, and lyrics that dealt with the heartbreak of Bobby Gillespie and Andrew Innes, who had both recently endured break-ups from their long-term partners. The song was released as a Japanese-only single in August 1992.

9 *I'M COMIN' DOWN*

The joyful highs of *Loaded*, *Movin' On Up* and *Come Together* are countered by the despairing *I'm Comin' Down*, a song which wasn't played live until the 20th anniversary shows in 2011, as the band wanted their shows to have a positive, celebratory feel when the album was released in 1991. Gillespie says that the sadness in the record wasn't obvious to him until he revisited it clean and sober for the anniversary shows, when drummer Darrin Mooney – who joined after *Screamadelica* – pointed it out.

10 *HIGHER THAN THE SUN (A DUB SYMPHONY IN TWO PARTS)*

While the edited *Higher Than The Sun* was included as it worked better within the realms of the album's tracklisting, this remix, featuring Jah Wobble, was also added.

11 *SHINE LIKE STARS*

As soon as this song was recorded, the band knew that it would close the album. A gentle, almost lullaby-like track, *Shine Like Stars* heralds the party being over after all the debauchery that comes before it. The album is broadly sequenced to reflect a wild, lost weekend, taking the listener on a trip which included hope and expectation, love and euphoria, and melancholy at the inevitable comedown.

said that the songs are the album's core. "It gets on my nerves when people think it was all down to me. I played a very small part in it," he said. "They're great songwriters, and Bobby is a really good singer, so it wasn't like I wasn't presented with some brilliant material to work with. They wrote absolutely beautiful songs and if I hadn't done a good job with them, I wouldn't have had any right to be in a studio."

"They wrote absolutely beautiful songs and if I hadn't done a good job with them, I wouldn't have had any right to be in a studio"
ANDY WEATHERALL

MOVIN' ON UP

Screamadelica was released on 23 September 1991 to a rapturous critical and commercial reception. As it had been preceded by four singles, it was expected to be a big hit for the band – but sales exceeded expectations and the album's initial print run of 60,000 copies sold out within days, forcing an emergency pressing to cope with demand. The album has re-entered the UK Top 100 several times over the years, peaking at No. 8 and spending 50 weeks there overall.

With a huge album to their name, and a string of era-defining singles under their belt, Primal Scream embraced the high life, appearing on *Top Of The Pops* and *The Word*, winning the inaugural Mercury Music Prize and infamously appearing on the cover of *Select* magazine alongside Kylie Minogue. The following year, they embarked on a tour which took debauchery to an entirely new level, with their own personal drug dealers part of the crew.

Wanting to capture the essence and energy of a rave in a gig setting, they toured with DJs supporting and played gigs that were all-nighters rather than the traditional rock gig. "We took drugs to get us on stage, more drugs during the gig and an aftershow wasn't an aftershow without drugs," Bobby said later. "The massive party that started with Alex of The Orb as the warm-up DJ would continue after we'd come off and dance with the crowd to Weatherall, and that would go on for ages."

It wasn't until listening to the masters of *Screamadelica* in 2010 for a 20th Anniversary reissue that Gillespie noticed another facet to the album.

"I really felt the emotion in it," he said. "When we made it, it was a really pure thing. We thought we'd made an independent rock record that was always going to be cool, and I was happy with that. Then people went mad for it and it became this other thing. When we listened to the master tapes, we were like: 'Whoa.' They were great performances, and it's a really sincere, heartfelt, emotional record. I hadn't noticed the sadness in it before – we just made it and thought, "Yeah, it's a hedonistic record."

Having sold over three million copies worldwide, made frequent appearances on Greatest Albums Of All Time lists and even had Paul Cannell's iconic cover art immortalised on a stamp, *Screamadelica*'s classic status is affirmed.

"It made a big impact and people still come up to me and say how much it means to them or how it was the soundtrack to events in their lives. I still find that touching," Gillespie said. "That's what music is supposed to do. I'm incredibly proud of it." ●

(l to r): Bobby Gillespie, Henry Olsen, Robert Young, Phillip Tomanov and Andrew Innes at the *Screamadelica* launch party

Getty

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"Once we went into recording *Weather Diaries*, I sensed it wasn't going to be a one-off. It was back to thinking, 'Yeah, this is my band' and that feeling has stayed. Hopefully we can do another 10 albums before we die... which is a concern these days!"

Ride's well-received 2017 comeback album *Weather Diaries* was only the start. What's happened next has seen Ride become spectacular again. As the stunning *This Is Not A Safe Place* continues their new chapter as a proper working band, they tell **John Earls** about the joys and frustrations of being back together, hugging the boss… and out-singing Michael Bolton on *Top Of The Pops*.

Gonzales Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

One hell of a Ride: (l to r) Mark Gardener, Steve Queralt, Loz Colbert and Andy Bell

By rights, Ride's reunion should have been a familiar story. Their return to touring in 2015 after 19 years apart was followed two years later by an engaging, up for it comeback album. *Weather Diaries* was better than most records by bands who had been dormant for so long. Nobody would have complained if our heroes disappeared off into the sunset again, or settled into a cosy routine of festival appearances and the occasional headline show.

Instead, Ride have decided to be Ride all over again. Properly. Which has meant another, better new album with *This Is Not A Safe Place* and determined talk that they're already thinking of further future records. "Once we went into recording *Weather Diaries*, I sensed it wasn't going to be a one-off," explains Andy Bell. "It was back to thinking, 'Yeah, this is my band' and that feeling has stayed. Hopefully we can do another 10 albums before we die… which is a concern these days!" Sat with bassist Steve Queralt in Bell's local café in North London, the pair break into delighted laughter. In their late 40s, the jokes may now be about mortality, but the important thing is they're joking again. All four of Ride are clearly back to being mates.

Although it took decades for Ride to resume being a band, the animosity around their break-up following 1996's disastrous fourth album *Tarantula* didn't actually last that long. They needed annual business meetings about accounts and such, and all four quickly started looking to getting together. "The reunion question would always arise, but we didn't want to damage our legacy," admits Queralt. "It wasn't until we saw bands like My Bloody Valentine and Slowdive do reunions really well, coming back with great tours and music, that we saw how it could be done. We realised we could build on what we'd left behind."

With all four members able songwriters, it was no surprise the fine *Weather Diaries* emerged from the ideas stored up as soon as Ride was a going concern again. But, as drummer Loz Colbert admits: "We were feeling our way a little with *Weather Diaries*. There was a frisson at what it was like to record together again after so long, and maybe there was a little bit of nervousness, too. We were pretty pleased in how that all culminated, because that record showed there was life in the old dog yet. But, after we'd made it, there was a sense of 'Well, what do we do now?'"

Bell emphasises it's Mark Gardener who was initially instrumental in pushing the idea of new music forward. Gardener speaks to *Long Live Vinyl* from the new studio he's built near his home in Oxfordshire, talking excitedly about its SSL console and moving his collection of vintage keyboards and acoustic guitars there, joking: "I'm surrounded by cool stuff and I even know how it all works now." Explaining his determination to have Ride become a regular band again, Gardener reasons: "The ultimate test of bands who get back together is their new records. If the chemistry still isn't right between band members, you get found out. If that chemistry is gone, you can still play the old songs, but new material won't happen well. I felt it was potentially right with Ride. These new songs have been the best feeling about the whole thing. Playing new songs live feels like fresh blood running through you. Not that the old songs are stale blood!"

Like his bandmates, Gardener is friendly and jokey. But he's also the most open in admitting that being back in a band after so long can be an adjustment. "It's really good and familiar to be back with the Ride boys," he states. "But some of the familiar frustrations come up as well. We all want to put in our

Steve Gullick

songs – and when you can't put in as much as you want, that can be frustrating. Sometimes it's frustrating when you feel you've got a few of your songs that get left on the shelf, but that's what being in a group is."

The construction of Gardener's studio meant he wasn't around to help oversee mixes and construct a running order for *This Is Not A Safe Place* as much as usual, but that's another advantage to being back in a band. "It's not all on you, and that's nice," he laughs. "Everyone has very capable ears!"

KRAUTROCK RAVE MONSTER

An important bridge between *Weather Diaries* and the new album came with last year's EP *Tomorrow's Shore*. Initially intended to showcase four songs that hadn't fitted on *Weather Diaries*, instead only *Catch You Dreaming* was carried over, with three new songs specially recorded. It harked back to Ride's earliest days, when they began with the spellbinding EPs *Ride*, *Fall* and *Play* in 1990 before debut album *Nowhere*. "More bands should do EPs," insists Bell. "It's like making a very quick, stress-free album. EPs are one of our strengths as a band." Queralt agrees, adding: "It's not just less pressure, EPs give you freedom to explore the corners of your sound more. *Tomorrow's Shore* is more out there than *Weather Diaries*. We'll definitely do another EP after *This Is Not A Safe Place*."

And if Ride's next EP is even more out there than *This Is Not A Safe Place*, it really will be quite something. Made with *Weather Diaries* producer Erol Alkan, Ride's sixth album is spectacular from the moment it kicks off with Krautrock rave monster *R.I.D.E.*, a stunning club-friendly banger soon followed by the equally groove-led pop beast *Repetition* and *Kill Switch*, already a savage live favourite and punkier than anything Ride have ever made. As enchanting as lead single *Future Love* was, it's one of the few songs immediately recognisable as Ride.

"We didn't go in expecting to make an album at all," admits Colbert. "But we all want that step in the dark; not knowing if we've got enough material, whether what we do have is good enough, or if we'll be too disparate and random to still be able to work together as a band. You don't know that. But if you jump in with confidence, it works. After the first week, we were buzzing with excitement."

Gardener credits Colbert for *Kill Switch*, saying: "It's from a riff on a Loz demo. Bearing in mind Loz doesn't play guitar, it sounded great – simple and direct. I kept walking past a bit of graffiti in Oxford that says 'Make the right noise', which fitted well. A few of the lyrics are mine, but mostly it was Loz and Andy exchanging lyrics. *Kill Switch* is a great example of how our band works well together."

R.I.D.E. came together on a day when Bell was away, at his grandmother's funeral: "I wasn't there, so I can say that song is magic," he smiles. Queralt recalls: "It started out a bit, dare I say… jazz-funk," a notion which causes the otherwise laidback Bell to turn and look horrified at the bassist. "It's a good job I wasn't there for that," he exclaims, mock-shivering over his sparkling water. "*R.I.D.E.* could have been another *Leave Them All Behind*," resumes Bell. "We added loads of sections and lyrics for verses. But it's ended up in its perfect form."

Instead, there are two epics on the album, with *Eternal Recurrence* closing Side two and *In This Room* the album's final song on Side four. "We allowed ourselves to stretch out on those two songs," says Queralt. "The other songs have an awareness of structure and the clock running down, so *Eternal Recurrence* and *In This Room* were always the contenders for the album closer. We think of albums as two halves, so *Eternal Recurrence* closes the first half. But, now everything is on heavyweight vinyl, we should maybe start to think of albums as being four quarters."

Another key song is *15 Minutes*, an unsettling, charged attack with the chorus "This was your 15 minutes, hope you had fun/ Have a nice life? Yeah, you're basically done now." Bell wrote it after Ride toured *Weather Diaries* in Asia, saying: "Quite a few songs on this album are from that period. They're about a situation we got ourselves into with someone we used to work with. It's a delicate situation, but a lot of songs came from our anger about it." Is the situation still going on? "It's going through a quiet period," Queralt interjects, before Bell summarises: "I'm not

Don't Leave CDs All Behind

Mark Gardener is aware his view is controversial for *Long Live Vinyl* readers, but he prefers to listen to certain music on CD. "I love CDs and still buy them," he says. "If you want to hear digital music, CDs have the highest bandwidth and quality. It's the closest to what I hear in the studio when I've mixed something. I'd love it if CDs came back in the way vinyl has." Having just finished building his studio, Gardener has the room back to get his vinyl out of storage and says he's blagged a new Audio-Technica turntable from a friend in the industry. "I'm looking forward to organising my vinyl and having it accessible – both for me and others who come to use the studio," he says.

Loz Colbert is also after buying his first turntable in a while, having recently moved house. "I've lived in all sorts of places, so I've gone for convenience," he says. "Technology has worked for me, for keeping track of music however I can. But I've been increasing my vinyl recently. I'm getting back a higher rate of audio appreciation!" Steve Queralt recently got converted to half-speed remasters thanks to Japan's reissue series and recalls spending $70 in Philadelphia on a Sunn O))) album otherwise unavailable on vinyl. Queralt's admission causes Andy Bell to reveal his own more modest vinyl budget. "I don't go expensive," he says. "£30 is my limit. The Brian Eno reissues look beautiful, but they're £32 each. And that's a series where you can't just buy one…"

sure these songs are going to help. It's best to leave it there…"

Two people Ride are happy to have resumed working with are Dick Green and Mark Bowen, former bosses at Ride's original label Creation, who now run the band's new record company Wichita. "I love those guys," Gardener eulogises. "It feels right to release records through Wichita and have that thread back to Creation. Back in the day, Dick was the quiet one at Creation, trying to keep it all together while everyone else was out of their minds. I didn't know Mark that well – he came on board around the time of Super Furry Animals, bringing Welsh anarchists to Creation. Mark is fantastic too, and we're really lucky that those guys still believe in what we do to the max." Has their working relationship changed with their label bosses? "I give Dick a lot more hugs now," laughs Bell. "In the 90s, we took everything a lot more for granted. I'm really grateful for this second chance. This is like being handed a chance to redo your life."

As a former singles buyer for the Oxford branch of Our Price, Queralt is hilarious talking about realising how the charts work from both sides of the counter. He recalls how he'd get two days' notice of which bands would be on that week's *Top Of The Pops*, so that Our Price could stock up for the resultant rush. "Indie bands had the opposite effect," grins Queralt. "We'd go on *Top Of The Pops* and sink like a stone. The show was there as promotion, in the days when singles steadily climbed the chart. Then *Leave Them All Behind* entered at No. 9, so we did *Top Of The Pops*… and we were back out of the chart immediately." Bell takes up the story: "*Top Of The Pops* was the absolute bastion of pop. Bands like us and The Wedding Present only got on it on a technicality. It was the other side of the coin of Kylie being top of the indie chart because she was on PWL."

When *Birdman* entered the chart at No. 38 in 1994, Ride were told they could be on *Top Of The Pops* if they did "something extra" for their performance. On the single's sleeve, Bell is sat on a throne. "Everyone was doing different stuff in lord of the manor style like Led Zeppelin," he explains of his regal demeanour. "It was the imperial period of the band. In theory, at least." So the throne came with Ride for their appearance. Better still, it was during the period when *TOTP* insisted acts sing live for their performance. "Michael Bolton was on after us," recalls Bell. "He took three vocal takes, while I nailed mine in one. But I now realise the producers maybe thought, 'This is all so horrible. Let's just do this as quick as possible and get him out of here. This experience is not what we do on *Top Of The Pops*'. They didn't even try to make us sound any better!"

> **Michael Bolton was on after us. He took three vocal takes, while I nailed mine in one**

CLIPPED WINGS

An archetype of a band caught in the album/tour/album cycle, Ride's first three LPs were released in four years. The third, *Carnival Of Light,* has its moments, but was Ride's first patchy release. They were becoming a pastiche of their retro influences. "I hold my hands up to that," confesses Bell. "The people in the band into electronic music weren't holding the reins. I pulled Ride into a retro direction. Everyone apart from me was going to raves and jungle nights. It wasn't like I didn't like electronic music, I just had a wobble. Our solution to making a slightly below-par album in *Carnival Of Light* was to record really quickly for *Tarantula*. We should have taken six months off, do something different and then see what different influences everyone had going on."

Colbert goes further in his assessment of Ride's first incarnation, saying: "One of the things we never did first time round was to make a decent studio album. That's no criticism of anyone we worked with, it's more about ourselves. We were too hooked on the band's organic nature. We clipped our own wings a little, because we didn't think making a good pop record sometimes involves a different process."

That's been solved by working with Erol Alkan. As an electronic artist, Alkan was a pioneer of the electroclash movement in the 2000s, but the band are quick to point out that Alkan knows how to get them performing well as a traditional band in the studio, too.

Meanwhile, everyone in Ride is adept with recording software such as Ableton and Logic. "Working with Erol again on the new album was a no-brainer," says Queralt. "He works fast, so you know what's going to happen that day, while allowing for some magic to happen, too. I've always liked it when bands develop a relationship with a producer – Nigel Godrich and Radiohead, or the first three Oasis albums with Owen Morris. It's a mini-story within a band's history."

Although they emphasise they now get time to enjoy touring, Ride are already planning the third album of their new incarnation. By the time *This Is Not A Safe Place* is released in August, it'll be 10 months since Ride finished recording. Now he has his studio, Gardener is keen to test it out. "We've got a great space," he says. "It might make it easier to get everyone together, because it's not going to clock up money. We've gained something we can use. The next tunes after this album? My head is already there." Ride are the opposite of cosy. But as a band, they've found a safe space at last. ●

***This Is Not A Safe Place* is out on 16 August. Ride tour from 29 November-12 December.**

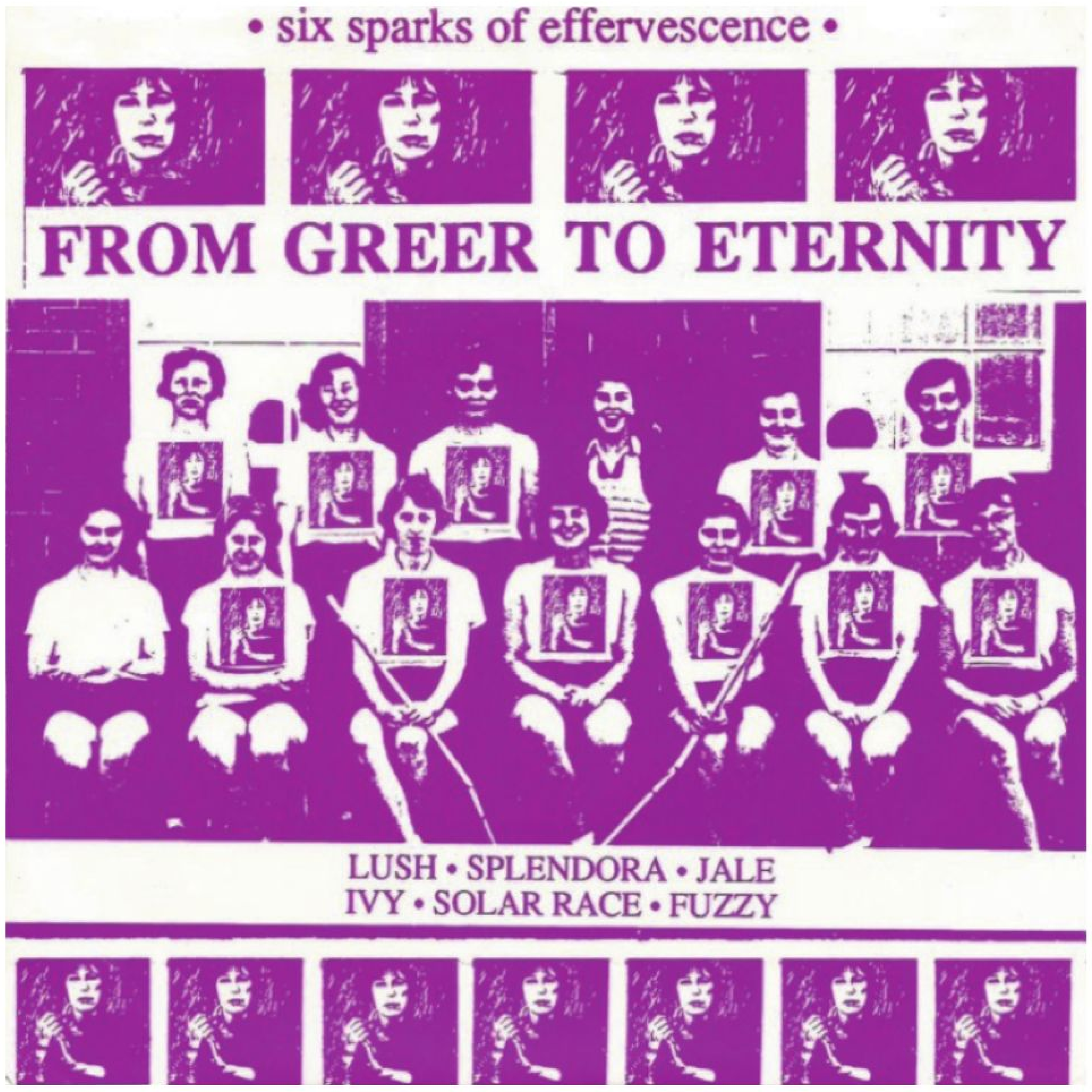
Ride's Secret Code

The artwork of *This Is Not A Safe Place* features three diagonal slashes next to Ride's logo. It means "This is not a safe place" and comes from The hobo code – a code drawn up by the homeless community in America.

Andy Bell discovered the code when he went to an exhibition of New York street artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose work is believed to have been influenced by the hobo code. "It was a messaging service in the homeless community," he explains. "They'd leave symbols for advice, like 'This is a good place – you get coffee' or 'Religious talk gets you a free meal'."

The vinyl comeback since Ride's return means they've been able to go to town on their artwork. "Vinyl is a great format for us," smiles Bell, recalling how the band formed at Oxfordshire School Of Art And Design.

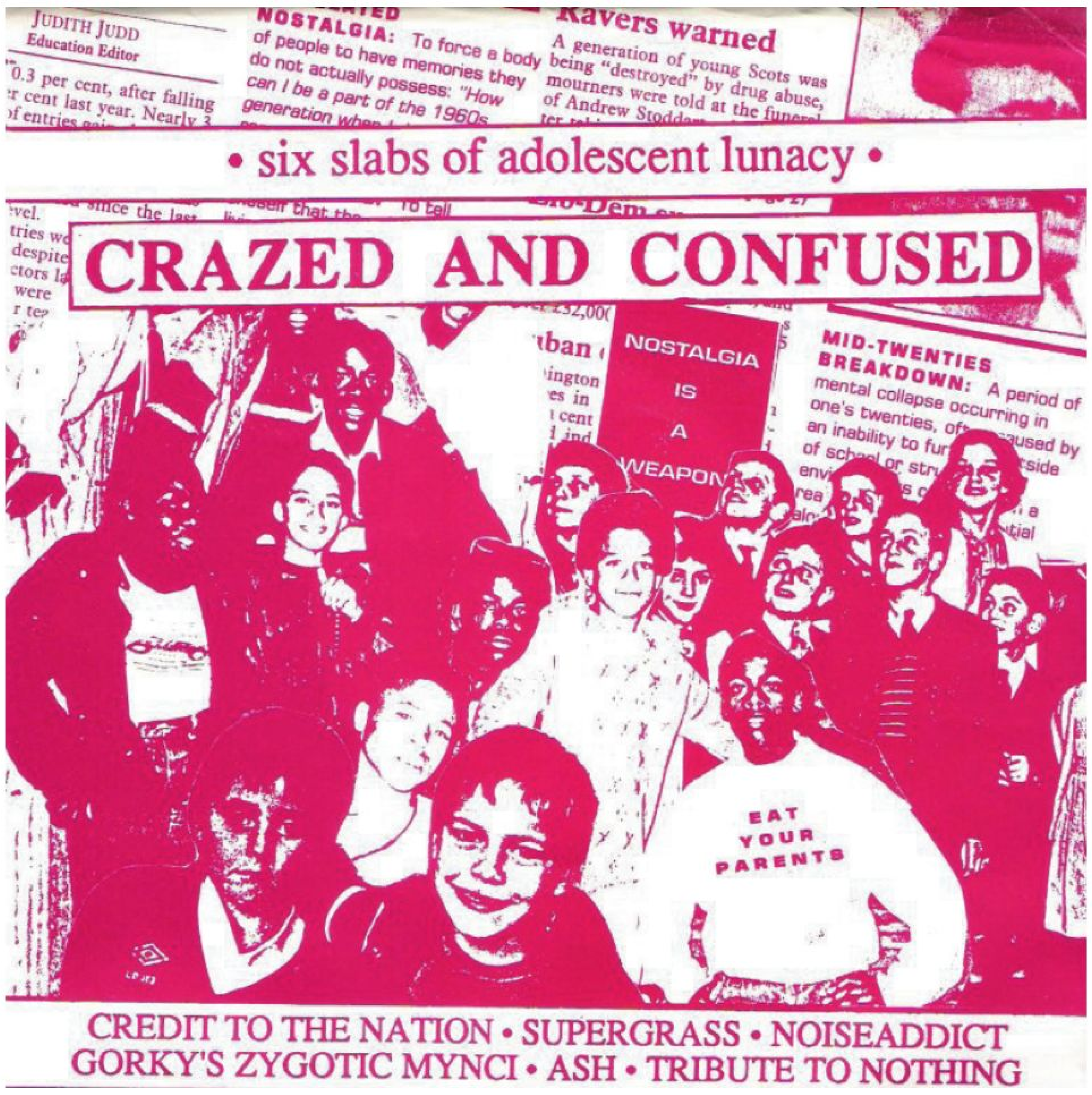
Steve Queralt adds: "Sleeve art is why vinyl is so popular, at least for me. If I like something on Spotify, I'll buy the vinyl. But I rarely play it! I love having the artwork and all the information on the inner sleeve, but the vinyl gets filed away. The great aspect of vinyl for me is the artwork is so big and colourful, and the sleevenotes so clear."

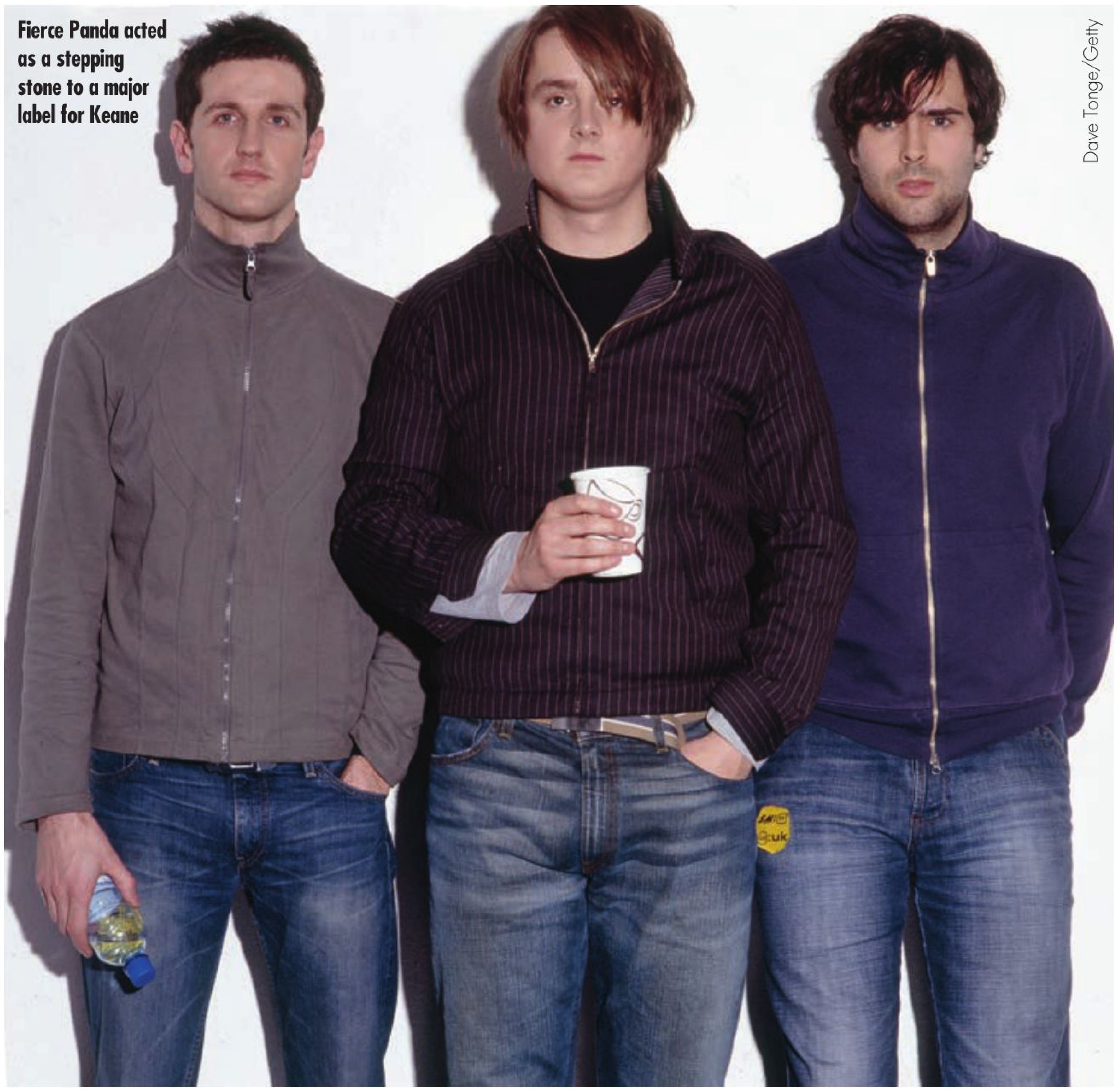


HOUSE OF FUN

THE FIERCE PANDA STORY

The joyful indie label has been a stepping stone for the careers of a swathe of UK talent. **Will Simpson** meets its founding father




Dave Tonge/Getty

Fierce Panda acted as a stepping stone to a major label for Keane

> "I THINK AROUND 2007 WAS ABOUT THE LAST TIME MAJOR LABELS ACTUALLY SIGNED GUITAR BANDS"
>
> **SIMON WILLIAMS**

"Is it going to be fun?" That's the question Fierce Panda owner Simon Williams asks when *Long Live Vinyl* approaches him for an interview about his label. Certainly, fun is the spirit in which it was launched, with two of Williams' fellow *NME* writers, back in 1994 and what has sustained it for a quarter of a century.

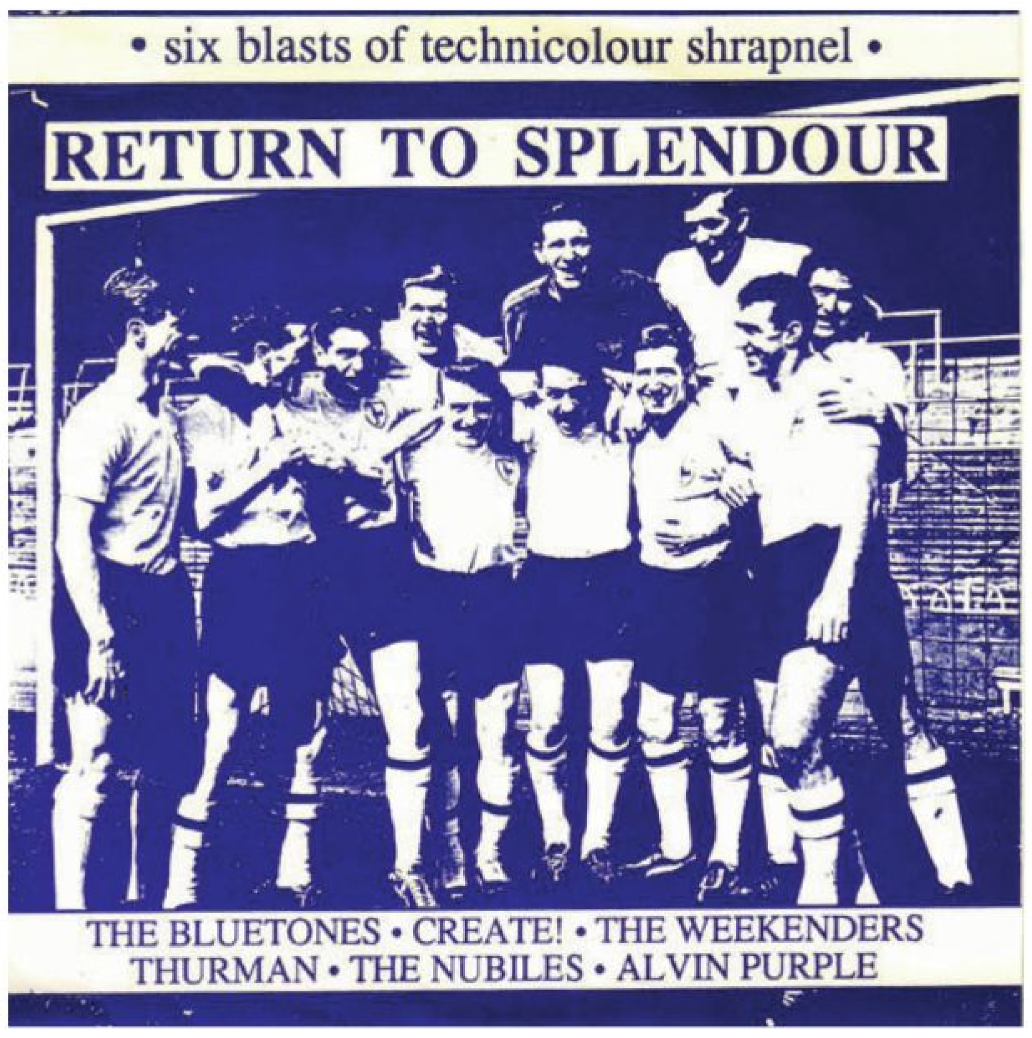
It's also the reason he's still there at the coalface; putting out records, discovering new bands and most importantly, going to gigs long after his contemporaries moved into 'serious' journalism. Williams is now 53, but when he talks his face lights up and the years fall off him. Truly, if the music industry ever gets to a point where it has no room for his sort of scampish enthusiasm then it really will be game over.

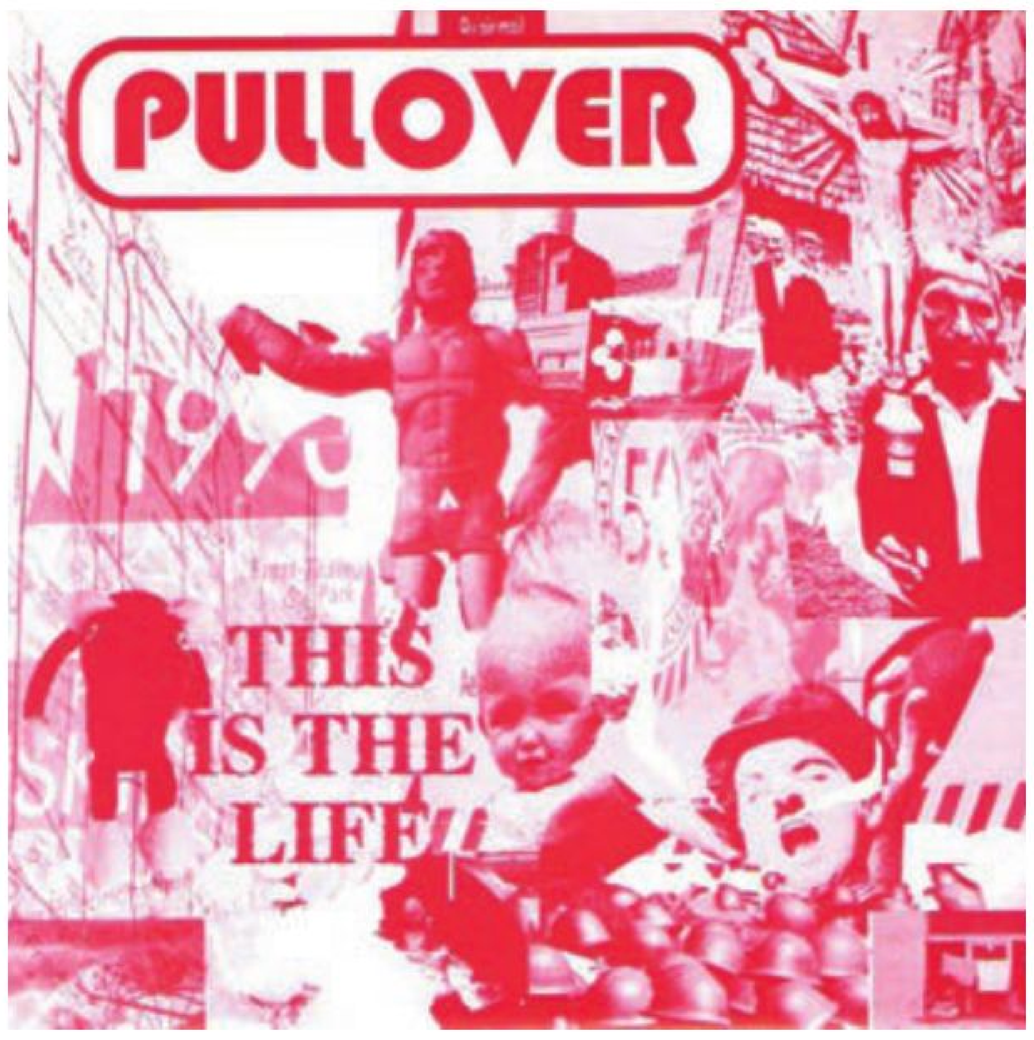
It all started, as so many great ideas do, in the pub. At the time, the *NME* were promoting a spurious pre-Britpop scene they dubbed 'the new wave of new wave', which consisted of a couple of punk-influenced bands and a smattering of amphetamine-fueled staring. "Myself, John Harris and Paul Moody decided we wanted to pay homage to this scene, it was our little punk. We said, 'Okay, what we need to do is do a tribute record. We could put four bands on a 7-inch single!' That's when we came up with Fierce Panda because I like pandas and, well, they're not fierce."

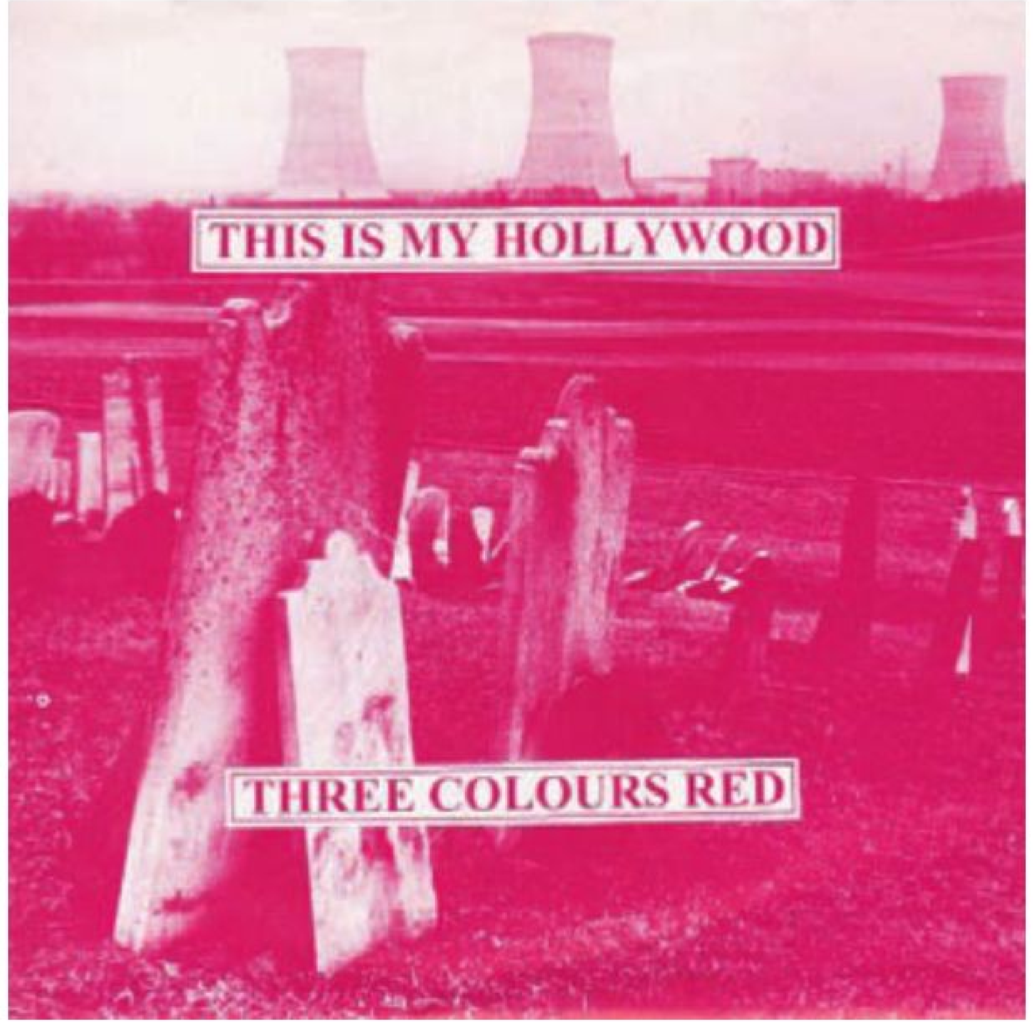
The next morning, the three hacks remembered the previous night's conversation. "'Erm putting a single out? Oh, how do we do that?'" Through a connection from Walthamstow record shop Ugly Child, Williams got in touch with Damaged Goods. "I phoned up Ian Damaged and said, 'We want to put a single out, do you want to be involved?' This meant we bypassed all the problems that you traditionally had setting up a label, like how do you do it? How do you make records? What happens? They had distribution through SRD, so we just jumped on board their ship."

In the end, Fierce Panda's first release, the *Shagging In The Streets* EP, featured six tracks by six bands and quickly sold out its entire run of 1,000 copies. Williams was hooked. Other punningly titled EPs followed that year; *Crazed And Confused* compiled punk-inspired Britpop bands including Ash and Supergrass, the mod-themed *Return To Splendour* helped launch The Bluetones' career and *From Greer To Eternity* featured six different female-fronted groups.

At this point, there was no long-term plan. "We were just completely led by the bands. So Scarfo (who featured Jamie Hince, later of The Kills) were the first ones who said, 'We want to do a proper release, our own single on Fierce Panda'. 'Do you? Okay'. Then it just started pouring out from there."







And so the one-off Fierce Panda single became a rite of passage for any aspiring indie band right through the 90s and into the next decade. Kenickie, Embrace, Idlewild and Placebo all released their vinyl debuts on the label en route to bagging major deals. Then there were those purveyors of (to use Alan McGee's memorable phrase) 'bedwetter music': Coldplay.

"We worked with them for six months," Williams recalls. "I saw them at the (Camden) Falcon at the end of '98 and they had been passed on by everyone. The industry thought, 'Sounds like a shit Travis. He looks like a student with shit hair'. But we loved them and put out *Brothers And Sisters*, Steve Lamacq played it and everyone went, 'Oh, this sounds quite good'.

"We spent loads of time with them. Every week, Chris Martin wanted to meet up. We'd go to the pub, he'd drink his little bottles of Schweppes bitter lemon and it would be questions, questions, questions: 'How does this work?' 'What does this do?' He was obsessed. Subsequent to that, I talked to people who studied with him at UCL and they'd say, 'He was a complete fucking pain in the arse. Every day it would be, come and see my band, come and see my band. Flyers. Flyers. Flyers'. And I use that story with every new band we sign, that's what you've got to do. You don't just give out 10 flyers and think, 'That's enough'."

As a holding pen for developing talent, Fierce Panda more than deserves its place in UK music history. Williams estimates more than 70 of their acts have gone on to sign to larger labels. "But when I grew up, that's what bands did," he explains. "Everyone from The Primitives to Pop Will Eat Itself went to majors. In the 80s, only really Depeche Mode and New Order stayed on indies. In the early days, we didn't need contracts, as people just trusted us. And that was it, off the band went and we were a little part of their history."

Desperate Journalist have released three albums' worth of elegant guitar pop through the label

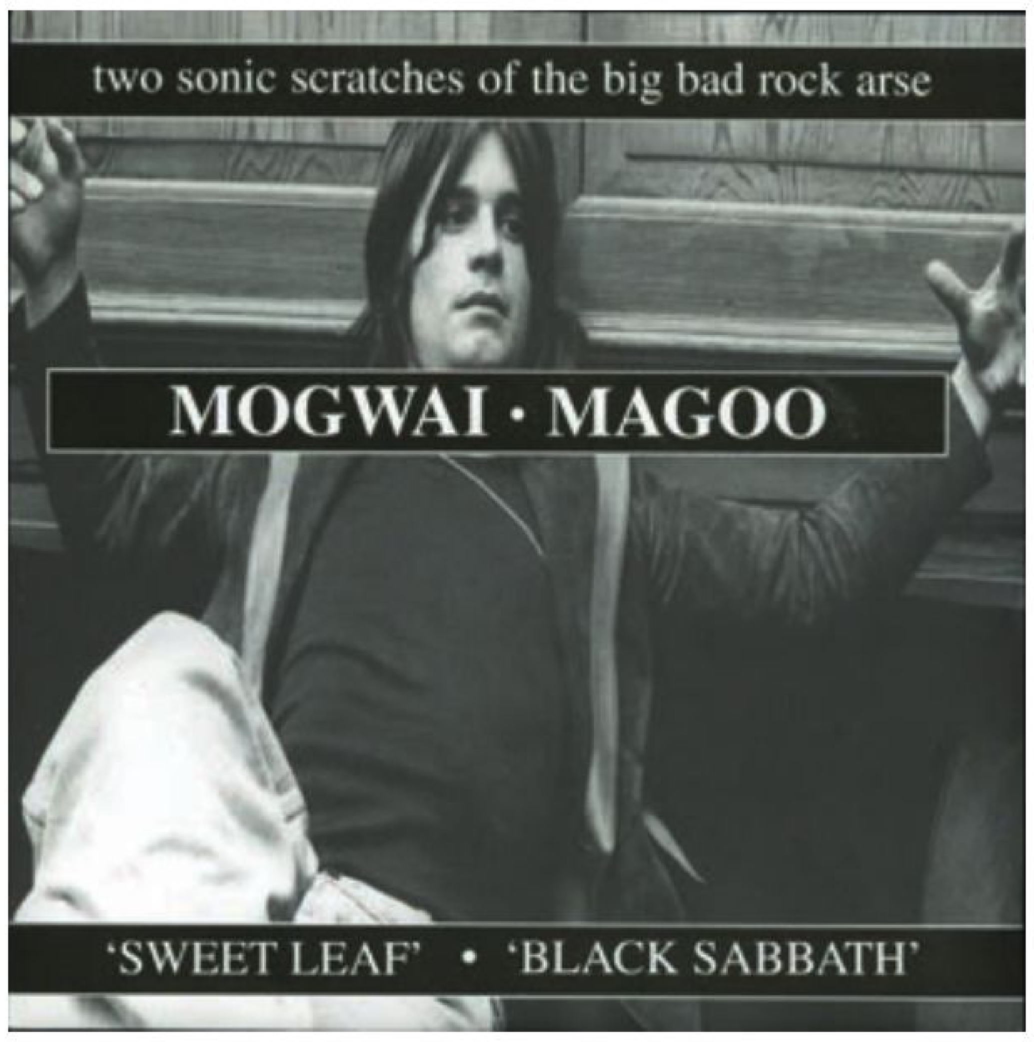
"I'D LOVE EVERYTHING TO BE ON VINYL, BUT OUR OFFICE WOULD HAVE TO BE THE SIZE OF BELGIUM DUE TO THE OVERSTOCK"

SIMON WILLIAMS

By the turn of the century, Williams had left the *NME*, his colleagues had dropped out and things were getting (slightly) more serious: the label had started releasing albums. They began doing the sort of things 'proper' indie labels do.

First, there was diversification in the form of dance-orientated (Rabid Badger) and post-rock (Livid Meerkat) imprints. Then they signed a partnership deal with Mushroom records that would see Seafood and Icelanders Bellatrix graduate to the major. When that ran out after two years, Williams found himself walking into another deal, this time with Island.

"It's emo but before it became screamo": New signings Somerset's China Bears



Piers Allardyce/Shutterstock

"He looks like a student with shit hair": Coldplay were a Fierce Panda discovery

"I remember sitting down at a meeting and they said, 'What we want you to do is bring us the new Coldplay'. So we all had a massive laugh and completely forgot about that conversation, and six months later we delivered them Keane."

A STICKY PATCH

Williams looks back on that era as a glorious time. "It was easy. I talk to A&R people now and they say, 'There was a period in my life when I'd be in meetings and first on the agenda was, What's Fierce Panda got out this week?' The problem is that you think that this is going to last forever." Things started getting sticky around 2007 when the impact of digital technology started being properly felt and CD sales began to plummet. To make matters worse, indie-rock suddenly found itself out of fashion. "Everything just turned to shit," Williams recalls. "I think around 2007 was about the last time major labels actually signed guitar bands.

"That connection between the majors and the indie world is just broken now. A few years back, you had a few bands who were signed direct; no fanbase, no vibe, no radio play. The majors seem to have convinced themselves that they can do this. But you're ignoring the entire history of rock 'n' roll! Look at Green Day, R.E.M., Coldplay, Keane, Elbow, Snow Patrol, Biffy Clyro. Festival line-ups now are still

WIBBLING RIVALRY

Probably the most notorious Fierce Panda release was this single containing the Gallagher brothers arguing during an *NME* interview with John Harris. "I remember John playing us the interview tape," Williams recalls. "And this was just the funniest thing since *The Troggs Tapes*." Somehow, the crazy idea arose of putting this expletive-filled squabble out on vinyl.

"We were absolutely petrified, mainly because of the question of who actually owned the recording. Is it IPC? Is it John's? In the end we thought, 'Let's go for it' and decided to put the asterisk in Oas*s to cover ourselves. We had this really weird few months where we were completely on the edge. Then Sony's lawyers phoned up and said, 'We've heard about this and apparently it's brilliant. Can you send a copy over to us so we can hear it and laugh', after which we were very relieved."

Then the sleeve ran into trouble. "We'd put a picture of the Kray Twins on the cover and a representative of theirs rang up and said, 'Reggie is not happy at being associated with this bunch of reprobates'. It was too late by that point, so we had to appease him by making a contribution to a charity of his choice."

Wibbling Rivalry reached the dizzy heights of No. 52 in November 1995 and to this day retains the accolade of being the highest-charting spoken word single released in the UK.

ESSENTIAL PANDA POPS

SHAGGING IN THE STREETS 1994

The EP that kicked it all off. A snapshot of a scene just before the arrival of Britpop. S*M*A*S*H and These Animal Men became briefly notorious within the pages of the music press. Blessed Ethel and Action Painting! didn't.

EMBRACE ALL YOU GOOD GOOD PEOPLE 1997

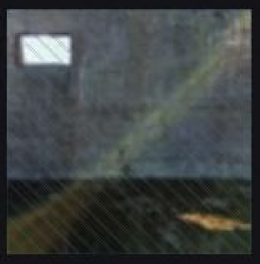
An instant anthem that unleashed a mini-wave of hype, which saw the McNamara brothers briefly compared to the then all-conquering Gallaghers. When released later in the year, on a major, it became the band's first Top 10 hit.

COLDPLAY BROTHERS AND SISTERS 1999

Not the band's debut release, that was the self-financed *Safety* EP, but certainly the single that first alerted the outside world to their talents. A copy of the seven-inch will now set you back at least £50.

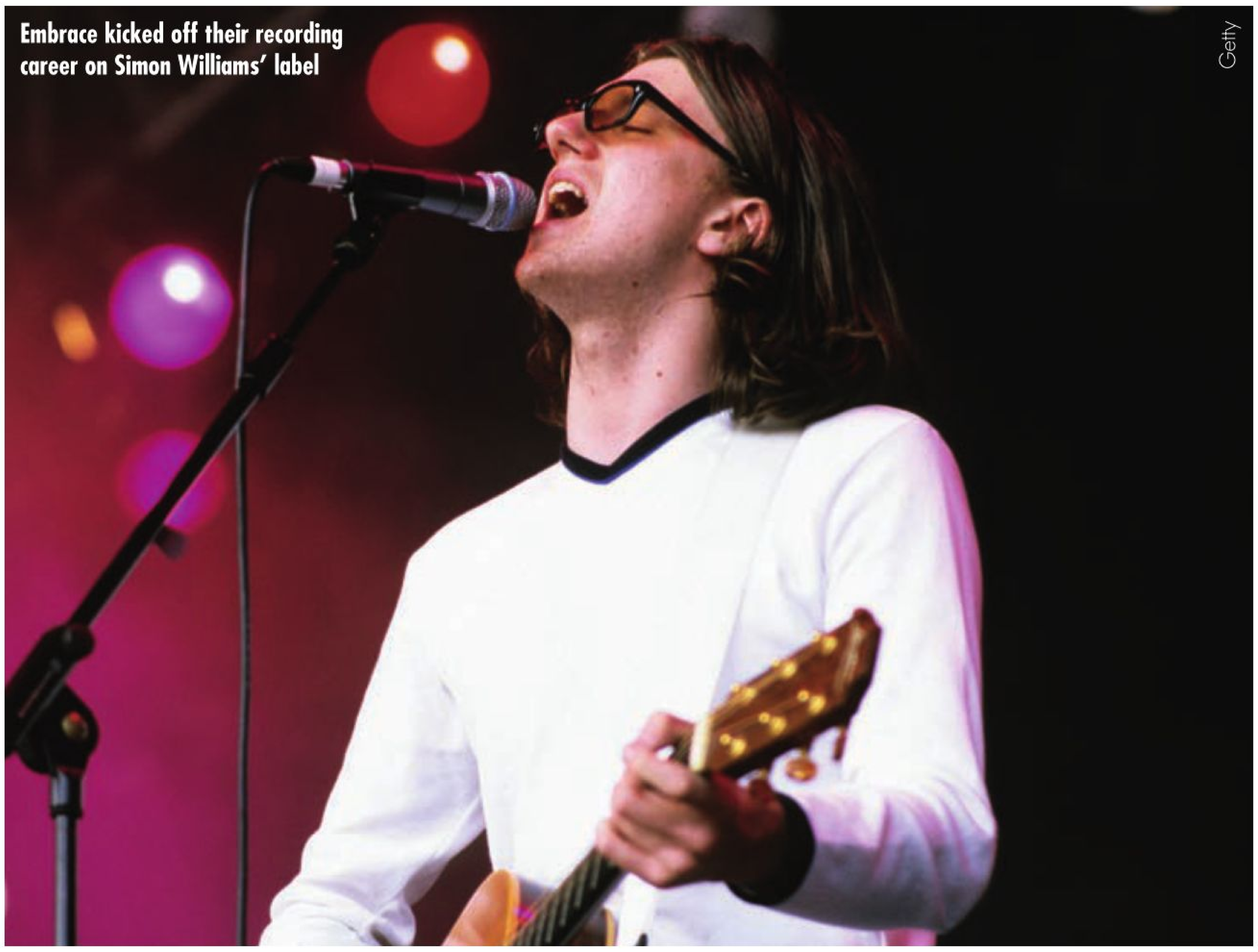
ART BRUT EMILY KANE 2005

Fierce Panda have never had a Top 40 hit. But this single, a paean to frontman Eddie Argos' teenage crush, is the one that got nearest. It stopped short at 41 in May 2005.



DESPERATE JOURNALIST IN SEARCH OF THE MIRACULOUS 2019

Proof that Fierce Panda still has it. A wide-eyed slightly gothy album that shows indie-rock is still alive and kicking in 2019.



Embrace kicked off their recording career on Simon Williams' label

Getty

relying on bands that made it more than 10 years ago. And they all started out on small labels. Biffy did three albums before they even got to a major!"

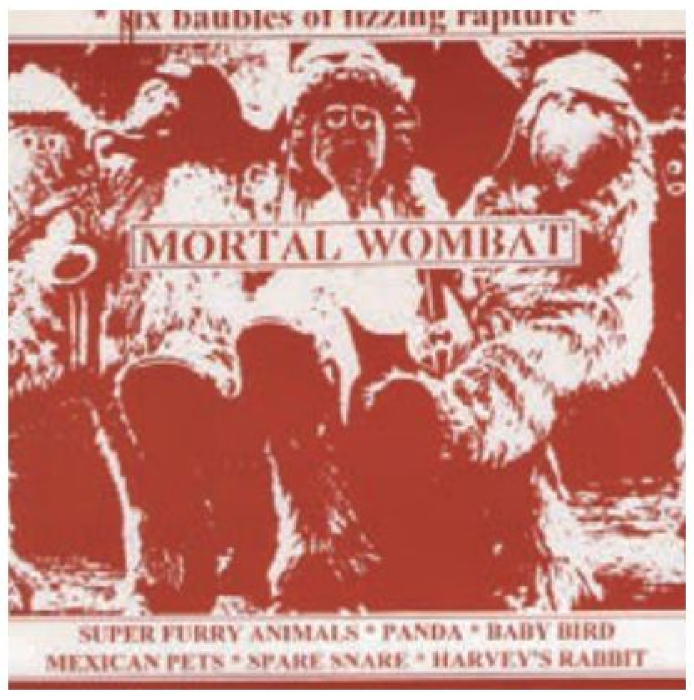
BETTER KEEP GOING

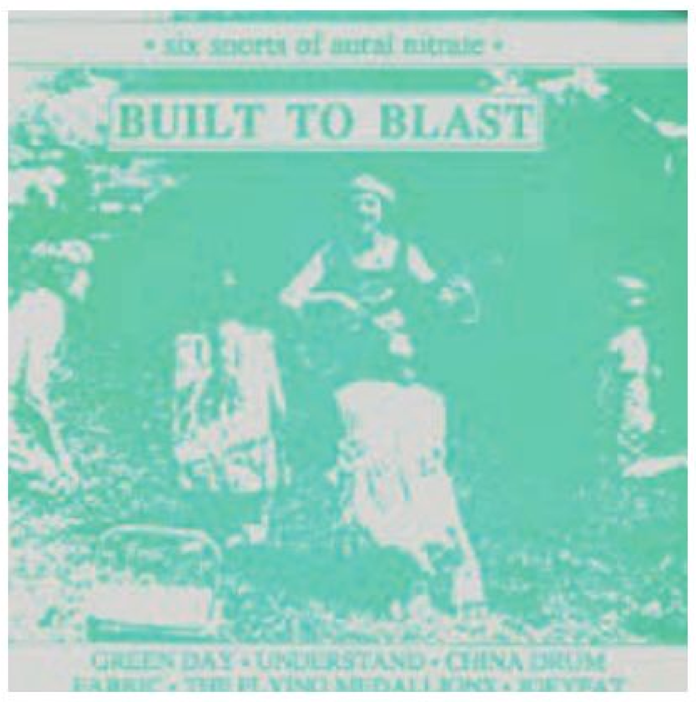
Somehow, though, Fierce Panda has survived. Their current roster includes windswept moody types Desperate Journalist and new signings China Bears ("they're Death Cab meets Biffy. It's emo but before it became screamo") and they've been dipping their toes back into singles via a Fierce Panda singles club. "Streaming is OK, we could do with more syncs. But we're clever, most of the press is in-house. All the radio is in-house. From what I can ascertain when I bump into other people, it's all the same. Virtually everyone is licensing stuff. The whole idea of taking a band and A&Ring them just doesn't happen. It's 'here's the EP, do you want to put it out?' which kind of takes away the fun to a certain extent, but that's the modern way."

Vinyl is still important to the label, even though they stopped issuing one-off vinyl singles over a decade back. "It's very, very difficult because every new band wants to do vinyl and I go, 'But who's going to buy it?' It breaks my heart. I'd love everything to be on vinyl, but our office would have to be the size of Belgium 'cos you'd have so much overstock.

"Also, you've got to have that trust in bands as well. There was one deal we did and it was a torturous process. We did a special deal in Eastern Europe, two vinyl albums for the price of whatever and we thought, 'Let's do this' and it was torture. It took ages for 300 copies of each and then one of the bands split up the week after it came out. I've never had the guts to sit down and work out how much we lost on that."

Despite episodes like that, Williams claims he's still having fun. "There's still just that element of surprise. You never know what's going to be out there. It's tough, of course. But it's tough for everyone at the moment. The good thing about what you do is the fact that whenever you think, 'Bollocks to this, I've had enough' someone points out that you've got six records coming out and you've just signed another band. So then you go, 'Oh yeah, good point. Better keep going'." ●





THE ESSENTIAL

Dream Pop

Where pop meets shoegaze, often with ethereal, ghostly results. **Daniel Dylan Wray** gets deeply atmospheric

As a genre term, dream pop embodies some of the same characteristics as the music it describes: it's hazy, ever-shifting, often undefinable and yet somehow distinctly recognisable. It overlaps with various other genres, most notably shoegaze, and it can veer into indie, pop, ambient, slowcore, post-punk and techno. One could argue records by the likes of My Bloody Valentine, The Cure and Young Marble Giants all drift into the realm of dream pop from time to time but, due to their prominent association with other genres, for the purpose of this list such artists do not feature.

Instead, this essential collection focuses on records that, while certainly touching upon other genres, have come to define the dream pop term and give it its sonic template. This is a template rich in texture, smothered in immersive atmospheres, swirling melodies and dreamy vocals; a sound that creates a place for listeners to bathe in, to plunge into and get lost and engulfed in. Like the most beautiful of dreams or the most potent of drug experiences, it's music that can transport you to another place.

The term itself is credited to have come from Alex Ayuli of A.R. Kane, a pivotal band who also feature here, and it came to prominence in the late 80s and early 90s. Instead of focusing on verses and choruses, or being led by riffs on guitars, the music favoured a more ambiguous and often abstract route – moving at a slower pace and unfurling like fog, moving in unpredictable ways and sneaking up on you.

In order to provide an eclectic presentation of records from the genre, no artist features more than twice in this list, but that's not to say they don't merit inclusion. Cocteau Twins for example, arguably the defining band of the genre, could rightfully be featured here multiple times. While as a genre dream pop largely had its boom period during the 1990s, there are artists that have carried forward the momentum, taking it into new places or simply keeping it alive. In order to capture a sense of this evolution, some more contemporary releases have also been included here.

For pricing, we have used Discogs' Median price based on the UK first pressing, unless otherwise stipulated.

40 THE CHURCH

STARFISH

ARISTA 1988

Australian outfit The Church may be more synonymous with alternative or indie rock, but on their fifth album they entered into a sonic territory that became softer, more textural and generally dream pop in tone. Guitars are still very much at the forefront of *Starfish* and it's song-heavy, but its knack for tapping into that hazy middle ground between texture and melody is a pleasing one from a surprising source.

AVERAGE £9.43

39 THE CHAMELEONS

STRANGE TIMES

GEFFEN 1986

A bit of an unexpected turn for the post-punk outfit on album number three. While the jangly, often jagged edges of earlier work are still present here, the band deliver something a lot more realised, produced and textural that frequently drifts into dreamy and hypnotic territory whilst still possessing some pop smarts, too.

AVERAGE £22.21

38 ASHRAE FAX

STATIC CRASH

HOT RELEASES 2011

Originally released in 2003, there's no escaping Liz Fraser's influence on this record's vocals, but rather than replicate her band's sound this album pushes into new and more contemporary terrain. Propelled forward with a heavy electronic pop presence that often borders on coldwave, it's often as euphoric as it is reserved, but succeeds in doing something new with the genre while retaining its original tone and style.

AVERAGE (US) £7.89

37 BELONG

COMMON ERA

KRANKY 2011

A relatively modern day offering from the ever-excellent Kranky Records. A misty record that melds shoegaze, drone, rock and ambient, that when combined with the hidden yet powerful vocals of Turk Dietrich finds itself in suitably dreamy territory, often shifting from harsh sonic landscapes to softer, glassier tones.

AVERAGE (US) £14.99

36 BEL CANTO
BIRDS OF PASSAGE

NETTWERK 1989

The Norwegian band create dreamy sonic landscapes utilising more electronics than many contemporaries. The result is an album that glides between synth-pop, ambient and dream pop, with almost a touch of new age gleam to it, plus Anneli Drecker's vocals always feel like the most perfectly fitting accompaniment to any sound they explore.

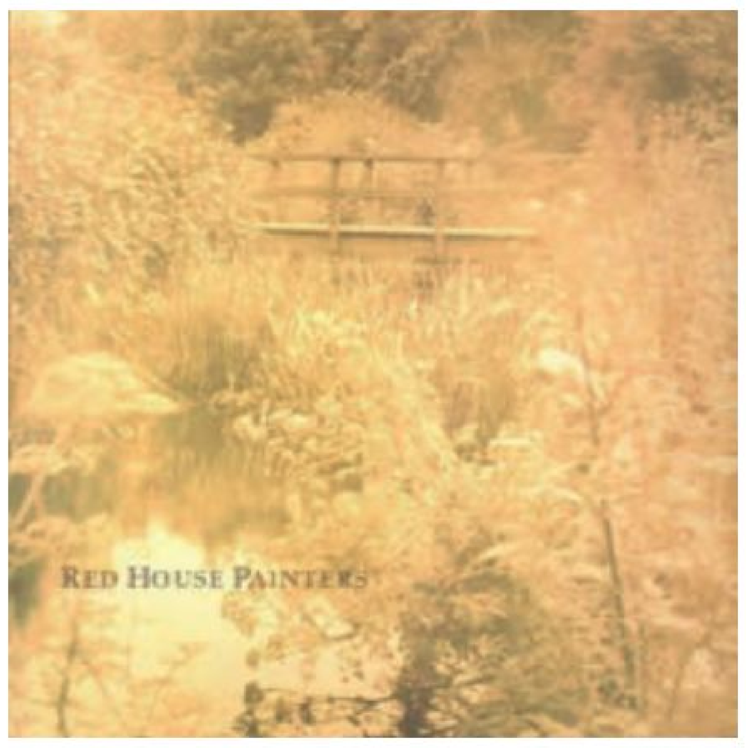
AVERAGE (SWEDEN) £13.82

35 A SUNNY DAY IN GLASGOW
SCRIBBLE MURAL COMIC JOURNAL

RUINED POTENTIAL 2007

The debut album from this American outfit was released some time after the dream pop boom had subsided, but years later the band managed to reimagine it into something that felt contemporary and of the time. Some of the textures explored harsher and more electronic territory, but coupled with the harmonious compelling voice of Lauren Daniels, the album finds itself picking up where many others left off.

AVERAGE (US) £46.50



34 RED HOUSE PAINTERS
RED HOUSE PAINTERS

4AD 1993

An album that spans slowcore, indie and folk as much as dream pop, but Mark Kozelek's rich-yet-tender voice, combined with brooding acoustics, stretched out melodies and a general humming warmth to the production finds this record slotting into place amongst other dream pop records. The immense texture and ambience the album exudes acts as a stark contrast to Kozelek's current waffling incarnation.

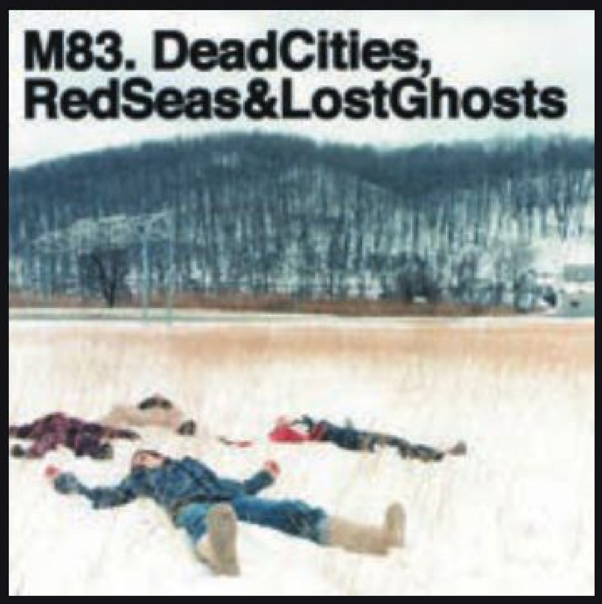
AVERAGE £59.62

33 AIR
THE VIRGIN SUICIDES

VIRGIN 2000

On the soundtrack to Sofia Coppola's debut film of the same name, Air managed to create a piece of work that was most befitting of their name: an airy, breezy, dreamy, hypnotic record that explored space and texture plentifully. Perhaps more typically structured, melodic and song-based than many other inclusions here, but an unquestionably rich and seductive listen nonetheless.

AVERAGE £19.34



32 M83
DEAD CITIES, RED SEAS & LOST GHOSTS

MUTE 2003

A potent blend of electronics, pop, post-rock and ambient collide for this more contemporary exploration of the genre. Whilst on occasion it's livelier and more visceral than traditional dream pop records, it also has moments that feel both intense and reflective in their deeply atmospheric and dreamy explorations.

AVERAGE (US) £25.67

31 HIS NAME IS ALIVE
HOME IS IN YOUR HEAD

4AD 1991

One of 4AD's many contributions to the genre, the second album from Michigan's His Name Is Alive, led by Warren Defever, is one that is both dreamy and experimental. The album was recorded on a four-track in Defever's basement. Be it stirring choral vocals, gently strummed acoustic guitars or mystery unexplainable sounds, it's utterly transfixing in its ability to lure you into its distinct little world.

AVERAGE £13.72

30 WINDY AND CARL
ANTARCTICA: THE BLISS OUT, VOL 2

DARLA 1997

Another act from Michigan, Windy And Carl are Windy Weber and Carl Hultgren. This their third album pulls you into another world from the second its hypnotic opening drones begin to unfold. Perhaps more typically, this could be considered an ambient album, but the processed guitar sounds and tonal palate have a lot of similarities with classic dream pop, despite the fact that there are no vocals here. It's highly underrated, so extra worthy of inclusion.

AVERAGE (US) £22.44

Shoe People

FIVE SHOEGAZE CLASSICS THAT COULD ALSO BE CONSIDERED DREAM POP

MY BLOODY VALENTINE
LOVELESS (CREATION, 1991)
The definitive album of the genre has come to represent the template for what shoegaze is: loud, harsh sounds coupled with soft sweet ones and all wrapped up in endless layers of blistering texture and fuzzed out guitars. An album as influential in the dream pop world as in the shoegaze one.

SLOWDIVE
SOUVLAKI (CREATION, 1993)
Slowdive's second album followed up on all the promise of their debut and then some. As beautifully tender and restrained as it is quietly forceful, the tones that come from the guitars feel as though they linger on forever.

MY BLOODY VALENTINE
ISN'T ANYTHING (CREATION, 1998)
The seismic impact of this band on the genre, decade and guitar music itself cannot be overstated and this debut album is the one that saw MBV trade up from some promising EPs to a band of immense importance. Most bands would be lucky to have one genre-defining album, but MBV have two.

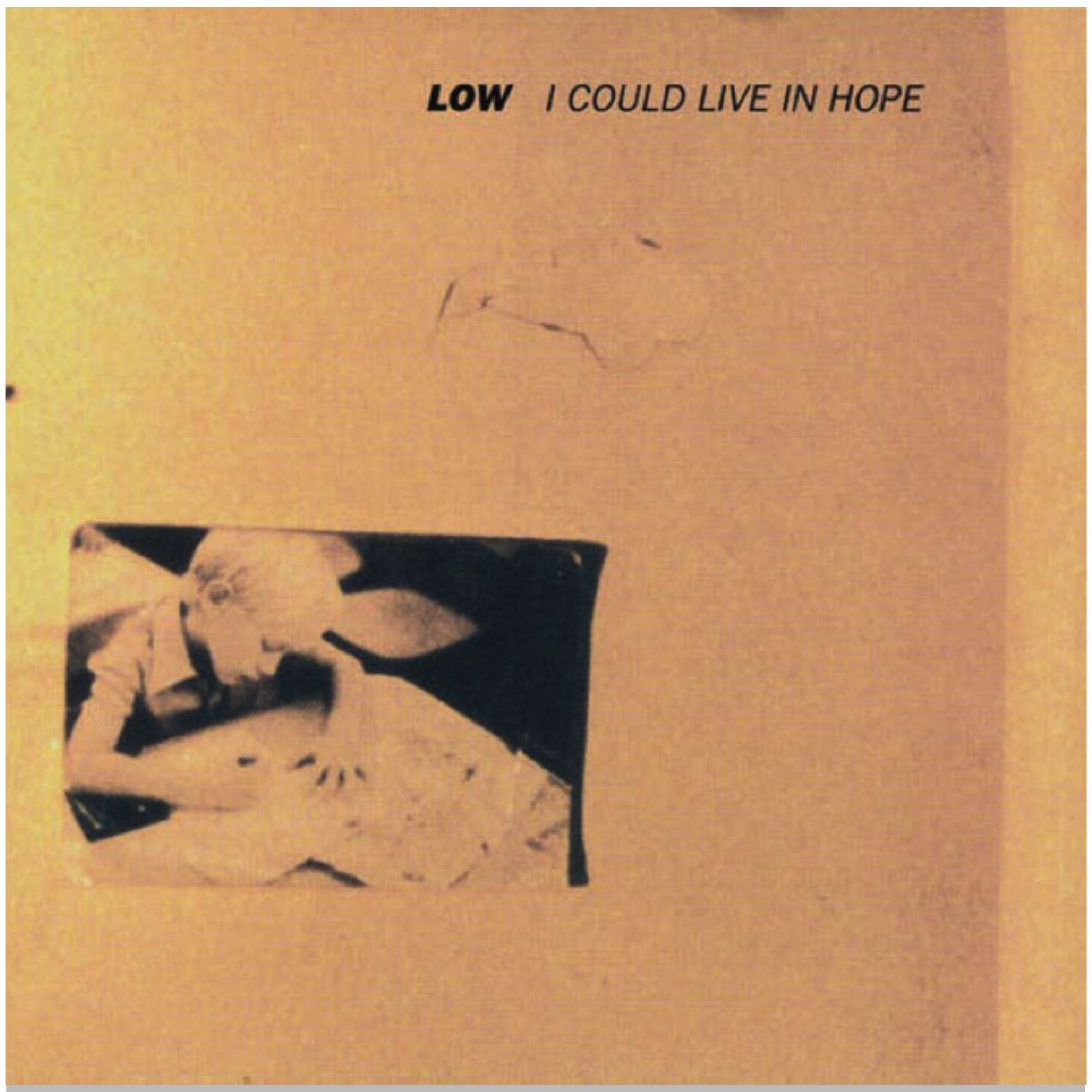
RIDE
NOWHERE (CREATION, 1990)
Perhaps the most pop and song-heavy album in the shoegaze cannon, often feeling as much of an indie-rock bordering on Britpop record as anything, but the band's reliance on fuzzy guitars, tangible production and rich texture also means this is a very close cousin of the dream pop world.

THE VERVE
A STORM IN HEAVEN (HUT, 1993)
Before they blew up and became one of the prominent bands of the Britpop era, The Verve were making much more interesting and sonically ambitious music. As demonstrated on their debut album, which is a lush soundscape of immersive textures, reverb-soaked guitars and Richard's Ashcroft's vocals creeping through occasional bursts of forceful guitars.

The Nico of dream pop: Chromatics' Ruth Radelet

29 CHROMATICS
KILL FOR LOVE
ITALIANS DO IT BETTER 2012
A glistening production of synth-laden dream pop on the fourth album from the American outfit. A record that feels both indebted to the past yet also shimmers with a futuristic edge and takes the essence of 90s dream pop and adds an iridescent noir dimension to it. More electronic, silky and sultry than some of the original works in the genre, but a key example of where it can be taken to.
AVERAGE £26.93

JAKUBASZEK/REDFERNS/GETTY



28 LOW
I COULD LIVE IN HOPE
VERNON YARD 1994
Arguably the album that came to define slowcore as much as dream pop, but given the extremely niche genre the former became, this deserves a place here. The band's debut album would set a template for the power of quiet. Reverb-laden guitars, sparse drums and interlocking glowing vocals sparkle throughout. **AVERAGE** (2011 Reissue) £118.50

27 BROADCAST
HAHA SOUND
WARP 2003
A slightly more experimental foray into dream pop, Broadcast utilised swirling psychedelia, jumping electronics and motorik rhythms around the central voice of the late Trish Keenan. However, Keenan's endlessly alluring vocals – ones that can be as soaring as they can tender and refrained – never fail to suck the listener into a world that is as dreamy as it often is hallucinogenic.
AVERAGE £32.77

26 THE WAKE
HERE COMES EVERYBODY
FACTORY 1985
Certainly an album that touches upon countless genres, from post-punk and indie to dub. However, the breathy vocals, dense production and deep exploration of texture place this as an early album delving into areas that many would only arrive at a decade later.
AVERAGE £35.55

25 A.R. KANE
69
ROUGH TRADE 1988
The artists who coined the term dream pop were actually a group committed to the exploration of multiple genres. Their debut is often as noisy and experimental as it is typically dreamy, but this 1988 release was a crucial (and overlooked) one that laid the vital groundwork for new textural explorations in guitar music.
AVERAGE £9.74

24 LUNA
LUNAPARK
ELEKTRA 1992
After the collapse of Galaxie 500 Dean Wareham formed Luna with Justin Harwood of the Chills and Stanley Demeski of The Feelies. Much like Galaxie 500, the band often veer more into rock and indie-pop territory, but Wareham's uncanny ability to craft lush soundscapes and deeply textured cloud-like songs continued gracefully into his new project, too.
AVERAGE (AUS) £89.77

23
THE TELESCOPES
THE TELESCOPES
CREATION 1992
On their second album, The Telescopes continued to explore the cross fertilisation of space rock, noise and psychedelic dream pop, although this album takes on a much more textured and slower approach than its noisier predecessor *Taste*. Plaintive acoustic guitars, swirling atmospheres and rich pull-you-in vocals lead the way on an album that didn't end up with the legacy it deserved.
AVERAGE £18.92

22 MOJAVE 3
ASK ME TOMORROW
4AD 1995
After the disbandment of shoegaze heroes Slowdive came Mojave 3, and with them came a distinctly more acoustic, folk-tinged sound that stood in stark contrast to the electronic ambience of Slowdive's final album. Here, over sparse, moody accompaniments, Rachel Goswell's vocals are left to float over the record in beautiful enveloping waves.
AVERAGE £84.79

18+
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21 LOVELIESCRUSHING
BLOWEYELASHWISH

WAVERTONE 1993

Leaning more towards the shoegaze end of things with huge surges of guitars and textures so thick and layered it's like wading through sonic glue, this album remains an overlooked addition to the mid-90s popularity of the genre. Despite the fuzzy guitars and quiet noise that bubbles quietly underneath, the endlessly ethereal vocals of Melissa Arpin-Duimstra add wonderfully dreamy textures to it all.

AVERAGE (US) £63.20

Retro futurists Broadcast with Trish Keenan standing

20 DIF JUZ
EXTRACTIONS

4AD 1985

Another 4AD addition to the genre. Whilst Liz Fraser pops up on this record as a guest, Dif Juz's debut was tonally quite far removed from her band. While intense, often moody and ambient, it also features saxophone, off-kilter rhythms and ever-shifting tonalities that expand the foundations of what is often constituted as dream pop.

AVERAGE £20

19 BEACH HOUSE
TEEN DREAM

BELLA UNION 2010

Of all the bands that have taken the formula of dream pop and carried it into a new age, Beach House are the most prevalent and consistent. The Baltimore duo explore deeply layered music that whooshes and swishes around the inescapable vocals of Victoria Legrand, often shifting between hazy pop moments and serene ambience.

AVERAGE £22.08

18 BROADCAST
TENDER BUTTONS

WARP 2005

Every Broadcast record could easily feature in this list, but there's a real poignancy to *Tender Buttons* in that it would be the band's last studio album, with the immense talent of Trish Keenan sadly dying. A record that is immediately transporting and rich with lucid and hallucinogenic offerings, gliding between weirdo pop, avant garde and wistful immersive ambience.

AVERAGE £80

WENDY REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY

17 MAZZY STAR
SHE HANGS BRIGHTLY
ROUGH TRADE 1990

Along with Cocteau Twins' Liz Fraser and Julee Cruise, the voice perhaps most synonymous with this genre is that of Hope Sandoval. The band's debut album allows her voice to float and haunt a record that glides between dreamy atmospherics, alt rock and psychedelic offerings to result in a record that Kurt Cobain listed in his favourite 50 of all time.

AVERAGE £40.64

16 LUSH
SPLIT
4AD 1994

The third album from a band that often walked the fine line between alt rock, pop and shoegaze. On this, the band are at their most introspective and dreamy. The near eight-minute *Desire Lines* perhaps most perfectly captures this mix of dense, floating vocals and slowly unfurling melody and moody guitars.

AVERAGE £46.12

15 THE SUNDAYS
READING, WRITING AND ARITHMETIC
ROUGH TRADE 1990

Jangly guitars, moody atmospherics and a pristine vocal collide to form a blend of pop that was as euphoric as it was introspective. The flat-out pop magic of *Here's Where The Story Ends* could have positioned the band as a real crossover sensation, but The Sundays remain more of a (relative) cult act in Rough Trade's rich history.

AVERAGE £26

14 LOW
THINGS WE LOST IN THE FIRE
2001 TUGBOAT

By this stage, Low's sonic formula of delicate, reserved melody with hushed vocals and echo-laden guitars had stretched out and been played with, but *Things We Lost In The Fire* is perhaps the record that comes closest to capturing the bare-bones essence of the band from when they started. Albeit with a richer, warmer glow of production to their delicacy.

AVERAGE £23.79

13 SPIRITUALIZED
LAZER GUIDED MELODIES
DEDICATED 1992

After the messy descent of Spacemen 3, Jason Pierce's Spiritualized continued some of the potent blast of psychedelic space rock that defined his previous band, but also changed the focus to a more textural, atmospheric, often melodic edge. The result is a record that is both the party and the comedown, as well as that dreamy half-asleep place in-between.

AVERAGE £47.49

12 GALAXIE 500
TODAY
ROUGH TRADE 1988

Another album that was as pivotal across slowcore, indie and college rock at the time. Dean Wareham's distinctly wonky vocals might not possess the conventional allure of some other vocalists of the genre, but the band's love of The Velvet Underground and Television combined with the melodic hush of Big Star created a new and unique sound for the decade that would be emulated heavily in years to come.

AVERAGE (US) £24.92

11 YO LA TENGO
AND THEN NOTHING TURNED ITSELF INSIDE-OUT
MATADOR 2000

By this stage in their career, Yo La Tengo had explored indie-rock, noise, pop and all manner of other avenues, but on their ninth album they distilled their sound down to something softer. Gentle pop lullabies with woozy guitar lines and quietly unfolding melodies brush against the delicate yet airy percussion to form one of the band's most quiet yet arresting records.

AVERAGE (US) £35.91

10 BOWERY ELECTRIC
BEAT

BEGGARS BANQUET 1996

Critically revered at the time and named rock LP of the year by *Melody Maker*, this 1996 album has been banished to the huge pile of brilliant but largely forgotten records. Its mix of beats, pulsing ambience, hushed vocals, subtle electronics and engulfing atmospheres positions this as one of the great albums of the era and the genre, arguably a touchstone for both trip hop and dream pop. **AVERAGE** £47.36

9 FELT
IGNITE THE SEVEN CANNONS

CHERRY RED 1985

Produced by Cocteau Twins' Robin Guthrie and featuring a knockout guest vocal performance from Liz Fraser on *Primitive Painters*, this album could warrant inclusion for that connection alone. However, on top of that, the layered jangle guitars, rich keyboards and the otherworldly yet fragile vocals of singer Lawrence find this as an album that sits beautifully between indie and dream pop.
AVERAGE £29.82

8 GALAXIE 500
ON FIRE

ROUGH TRADE 1989

Galaxie 500's follow-up album trumps their first, *Today*, as they delve further into their idiosyncratic world of wonky vocals, off-kilter melodies, slowed-down grooves and quietly screeching guitar solos. A record that successfully manages to feel quiet and tender as often as it does raucous and wild.
AVERAGE £30.52

7 GROUPER
DRAGGING A DEAD DEER UP A HILL

TYPE 2008

Liz Harris of Grouper has the kind of voice that unplugs you from the world in an instant. When combined with her deeply textural and often intense sonic landscapes, she creates a blend of psychedelic ambient dream pop that can be as stirring as it can escapist. On her fifth album, she projects a particularly potent combination of these things.
AVERAGE £60

6 THIS MORTAL COIL
IT'LL END IN TEARS

4AD 1984

This debut album from the 4AD collective may be an album of covers, but it managed to retain a distinct sense of tone and personality. Filled with echo-laden atmospheres, shimmering guitars and a brooding near-melancholic tone, it is most perfectly defined by the shiver-inducing cover of Tim Buckley's *Song To The Siren* as sung by Liz Fraser.
AVERAGE £15.38

5 COCTEAU TWINS
BLUE BELL KNOLL

4AD 1988

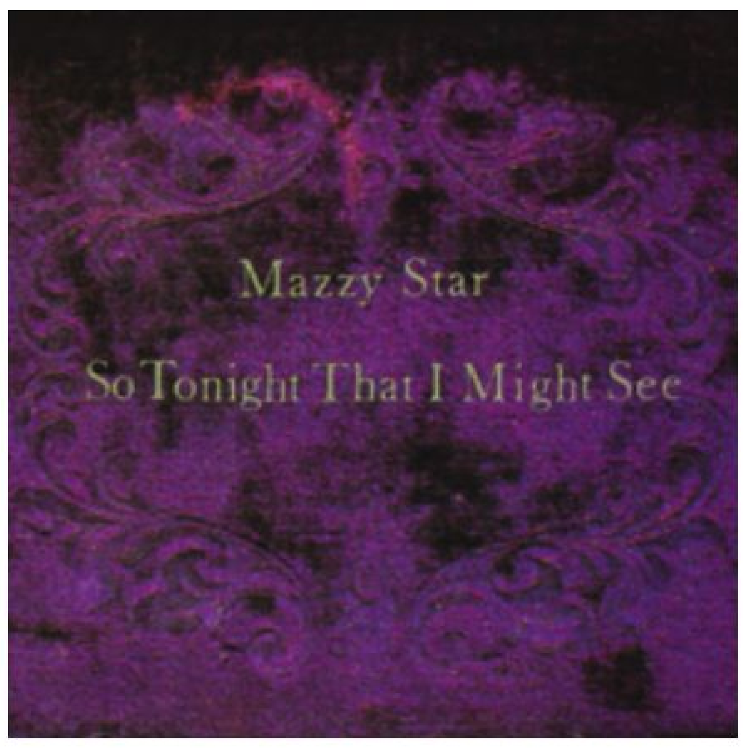
Five albums in and the spellbinding Cocteau Twins continue to reach new heights, with Capitol releasing the LP in the US. *Blue Bell Knoll* oozes such a magnitude of texture and atmosphere you can almost feel it leaking out of your speakers. *Carloyn's Fingers* is up there with their finest moments. Robin Guthrie remastered the album for a 2003 reissue, with a 180g edition following in 2014.
AVERAGE £21.38

4 JULEE CRUISE
FLOATING INTO THE NIGHT

WARNER 1989

A landmark record for the genre, that proved as much of a pinnacle sonically as it did cinematically, with much of the music made in collaboration with David Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti being used for his cult TV show *Twin Peaks*, as well as appearing in *Blue Velvet* and *Industrial Symphony No. 1*. The instrumental version of *Falling* was picked as *Twin Peaks*' theme song, elevating Cruise from unknown status. Her voice is the essence of dreaminess, and when merged with dense soundscapes and the hum of a Fender Rhodes it can be a transcendent listen.
AVERAGE (US) £31.38

Cocteau Twins (l-r): Simon Raymonde, Liz Fraser, Robin Guthrie



3 MAZZY STAR
SO TONIGHT THAT I MIGHT SEE

CAPITOL 1993

On their follow-up album, Mazzy Star plunged even further into a dreamy world. The utterly glorious *Fade Into You* is the perfect album opener, allowing the listener to fade into the band's world. What follows is deeply hypnotic and almost trance-like at times, the ghostly presence of *Into Dust* devastating in its beauty.

AVERAGE £84.89

2 THIS MORTAL COIL
BLOOD

4AD 1991

The final album from the 4AD supergroup and a double one, too. Featuring a mix of covers and originals, *Blood* finds the band cementing a sound and style that truly became theirs. Matching beauty and eloquence with a haunting frailty, it remains an absolutely distinctive record that many bands have attempted to emulate.

AVERAGE £32.36

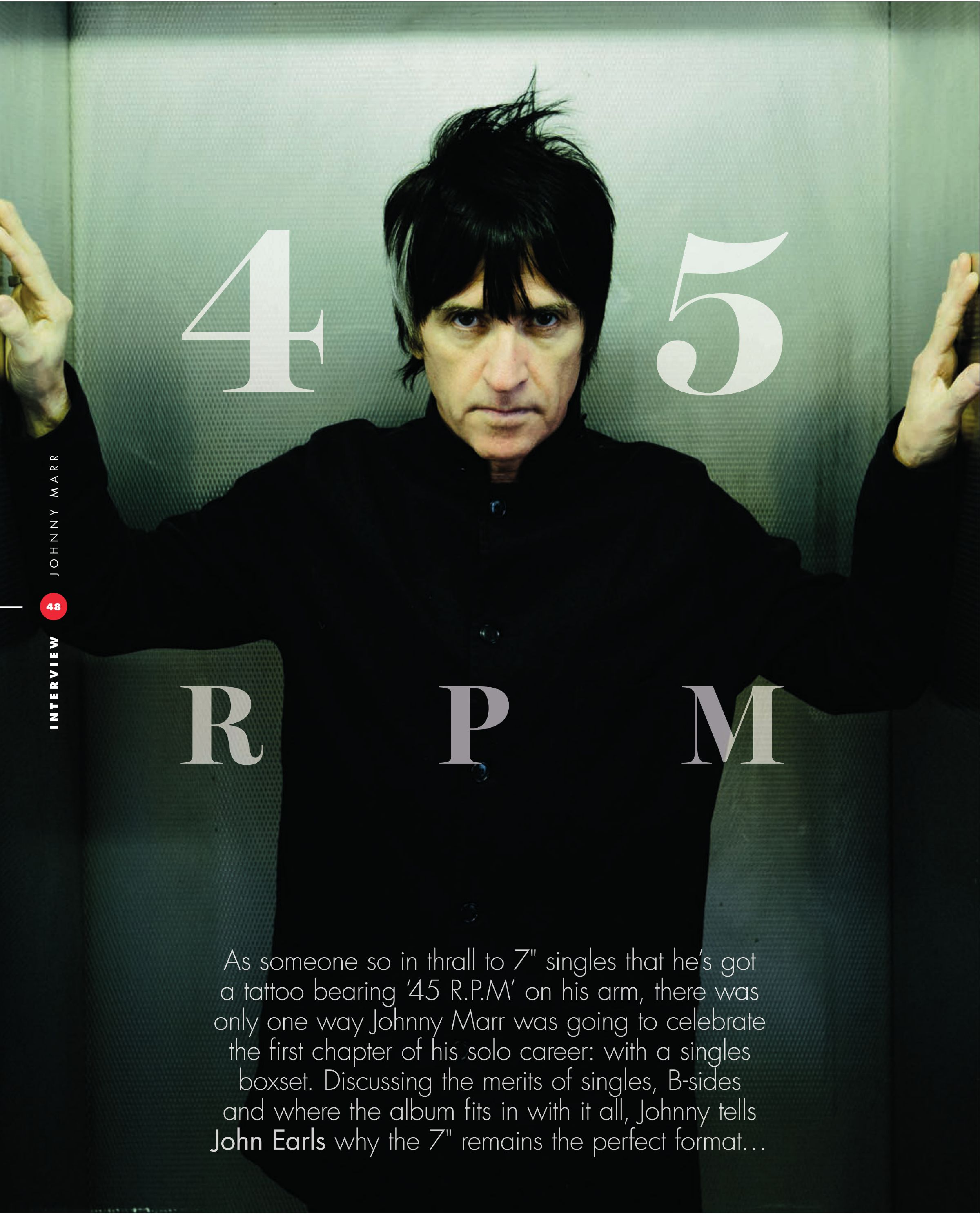
1 COCTEAU TWINS
HEAVEN OR LAS VEGAS

4AD 1990

A landmark record in every sense: era-defining, label-defining and genre-defining. Six albums in and amid personal tensions and drug problems in the band, this could have been a disaster record, but instead something magical emerged from it. Haunting, beautiful, gloomy, dark, immersive and everything else. From the opening seconds of the majestic *Cherry-Coloured Funk*, the album is like riding on a cloud.

AVERAGE £41.99

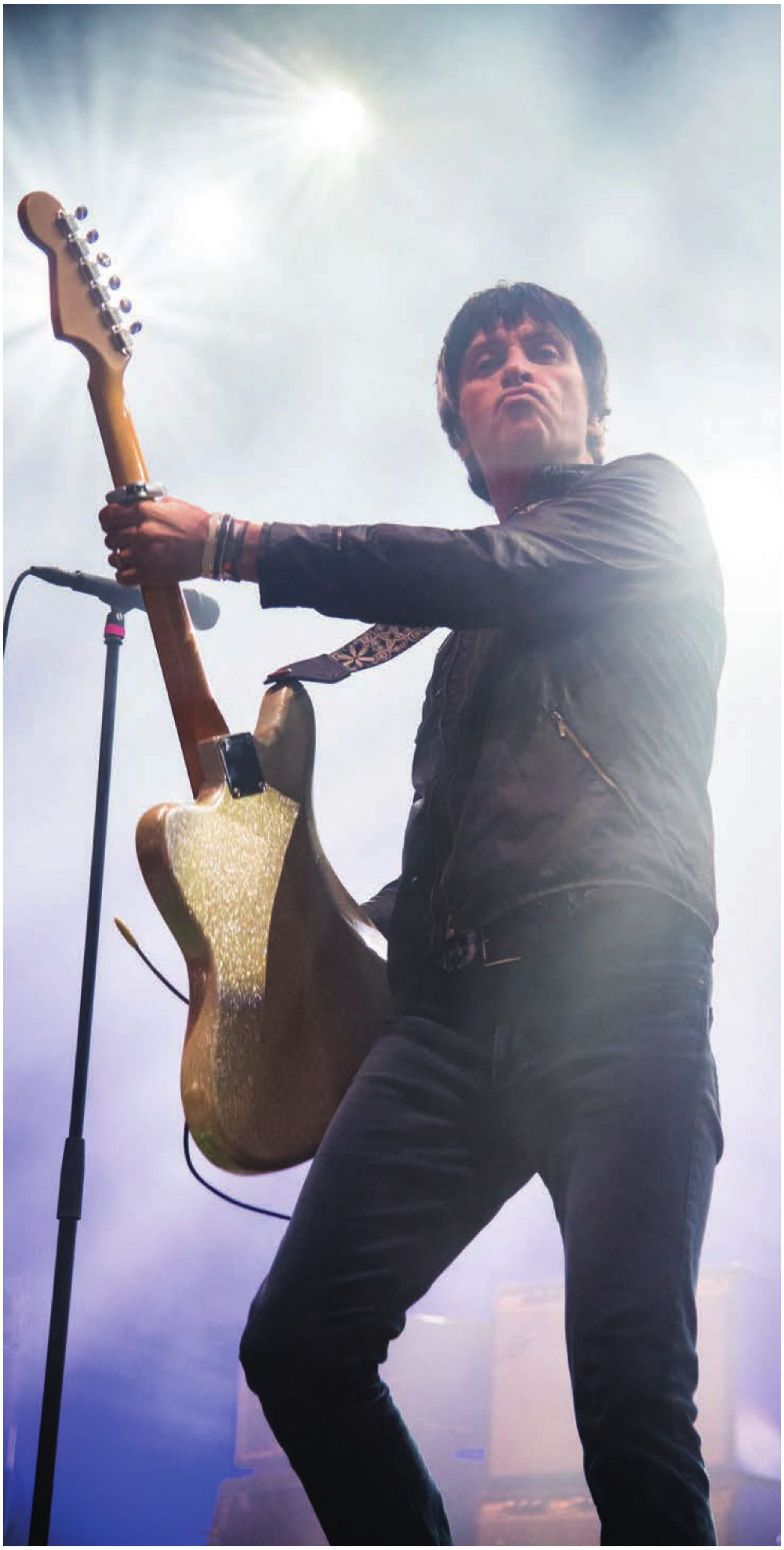
BOB BERG/GETTY



45 R P M

As someone so in thrall to 7" singles that he's got a tattoo bearing '45 R.P.M' on his arm, there was only one way Johnny Marr was going to celebrate the first chapter of his solo career: with a singles boxset. Discussing the merits of singles, B-sides and where the album fits in with it all, Johnny tells **John Earls** why the 7" remains the perfect format…

Indie guitar hero Johnny Marr remains besotted with the 7" single format



"The 7" single and 45rpm is as symbolic as religion and mysticism to me." Johnny Marr is discussing the tattoo on his right forearm, which bears a "45 R.P.M." inscription in Parlophone's vintage font. Johnny's favourite of his nine tattoos, it matches the image of Shiva on his left forearm. "I wanted to echo the Shiva's religious symbol," says Johnny of the tattoo he had done when he himself was 45, in 2008. "45s are a really big deal to me, and I wanted to honour that."

It's surely no coincidence that 45 was a landmark year in Johnny's life – after giving up alcohol, he took up running. He still runs about 35 miles every week. "45 turned out to be way more significant than turning 30," he laughs. "My life took on a different momentum. Whenever friends have got to that age, I'm very enthusiastic with them about becoming 45. I'd started running but, once I hit 45, I basically became Forrest Gump."

It's only natural that Johnny spends so much of his life running at top speed – his new singles boxset *Single Life* is a rare example of Johnny Marr looking backwards. There was his acclaimed autobiography *Set The Boy Free* in 2016 but, musically, Johnny hardly ever stands still. The reason for the boxset is to celebrate his solo career's first phase: he's now

NIALL LEA JOSEPH OKPAKO/REDFERNS/GETTY

released 10 singles in his own right. "Ten is a good number," states Johnny. "It sums up the first part of my solo phase, and the time is right to release it now, because there'll be something new coming soon."

Johnny apologises for sounding sleepy, explaining he's been working overnight, not just on his fourth solo album but a pair of movie soundtracks with his friend Hans Zimmer. They last collaborated on the score for Christopher Nolan's *Inception*. "I'm not supposed to say what the movies are," he admits. "But it's me and Hans, so you can probably guess." Nolan's new thriller *Tenet* is due out soon, and as we were about to go to press, it was announced the pair have collaborated on the new James Bond soundtrack. Johnny's own next album is five songs in: "At the place where I'm about to find out what it is." The idea it could go anywhere also applies to its lyrical themes, though the self doubt in the epic *Walk Into The Sea* from 2018's *Call The Comet* is a touchstone. "I learned people connect with an emotional authenticity," explains Johnny. "I'm getting more and more OK with revealing my own emotions. I'm trying to find the right balance between emotional authenticity and really cool pop art ideas, which I learned from Brian Eno and Siouxsie Sioux. I don't care whether *Spellbound* is something Siouxsie actually felt, it just makes for a really good single!"

THIS IS POP

It's important to Johnny that his albums contain "at least two or three and hopefully four or five" singles. He says he's "100%" a pop musician, eulogising the compilation albums such as *20 Dynamic Hits* he grew up on in the 70s. "I learned to play and particularly arrange music from studying those compilations," says Johnny. "Those compilations had Argent, Deep Purple, Sparks, Bill Withers, Sly And The Family Stone, Slade… that wasn't artless music, so I've always taken pride in saying I'm a pop musician. I have 45rpm tattooed on my arm, not 33rpm."

As part of that ethos, Johnny relishes his role as what he calls "The singles guy" in his bands. "In Electronic, I pretty much always came up with the singles," he says. "*Get The Message*, *For You*, *Vivid* – they were me and it was maybe the same in The The, with *Slow Emotion Replay*. I have a respect, enthusiasm and excitement for what a single is. Paradoxically, the restrictions a single imposes on you, I see as a strength. Being restricted to three or four minutes, you have to make an impact, the intros have to be really interesting. Alex Turner, Paul Weller and Noel Gallagher understand that, and really good modern people like Billie Eilish do, too."

When Johnny began his solo career, he bought his first jukebox, installing his AMI Continental in the middle of his kitchen. "*Upstarts*, *New Town Velocity* and *Dynamo* were written very much with that jukebox in mind," he says. "I no longer put a strong argument for the single being culturally essential, because it's great you can listen to music on the bus or at the gym on your headphones. I spent a lot of my school days walking around with invisible headphones on, because I'd play a song really loud seven times in a row in my bedroom before walking to school, trying all day to keep the sound of it in my head before rushing home to play it again."

What was the last song Johnny played seven times in a row? "I still do it! I loved *Walk The Walk* by Gaz Coombes and any good new band like Fontaines D.C. will get that treatment. The boring real answer is the song I'm working on right now. My poor family have to live with that whenever I get excited by a song. I come home, play it eight or nine times in a row until they go, 'I get it! It's really good! Great, can we move on…?'"

ON THE FLIP

Equally as important for Johnny's singles are the B-sides. In an age where any songs not used on an album tend to get saved for its Deluxe Edition, *Single Life* is wonderful for having a wealth of fantastic new tunes on the flipsides. The scabrous rollicking pop music of *Jeopardy* and *Spectral Eyes*… Johnny hasn't lost his ability to treat anyone willing to turn the single over to a whole other world of wonder.

"The loss of the B-side is a lost opportunity for musicians," he states. "I know what great results the B-side can bring. I don't see the 7" as a niche retro idea, I still see it as the perfect format. As a device for writing songs, it's wholly valid. You shouldn't ignore the opportunity to put out a great B-side. A perfect B-side holds your attention. It can't be entirely throwaway, it has to have intrigue. Before I formed The Smiths, I regarded B-sides as an opportunity, which I got from Roxy Music. They give you a licence to be eccentric and go under the radar."

The Smiths, of course, were one of the all-time great B-sides bands… "Everybody knows that, if you're into The Smiths, the B-sides were a culture unto themselves," says Johnny. "That makes me very proud. We walked the walk, and it's crazily cool that some of our most successful songs came from B-sides. The only Smiths song on *Single Life* is *Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want* which, having been a B-side, is a circular

Going Out Of His Head

Vinyl obsessive Marr owns no fewer than 9 copies of this early Stones LP

To this day, the most money Johnny has spent on one record dates back to his Smiths days. "I spent £80 or £90 on a version of The Rolling Stones' *Out Of Our Heads*," he recalls. "I was obsessed with that album in The Smiths; I've got seven versions of it – two American editions, a German pressing… A friend spent £500 on The Velvet Underground's first album in its original wrapping, but I can't be bothered with that side of collecting. I have to play it! I'm lucky, because fans have gifted me some amazing records, like an original version of The Stooges' *Raw Power*."

Johnny's favourite record shop is veteran Manchester treasure trove Kingbee. "They've stayed open for so long because their prices are fair," he reasons. "I found an early John Barry record there for £17 recently."

Johnny buys new releases on vinyl where he can, but admits he still blags singles from friends: "When I heard *Right Thoughts, Right Words, Right Action* by Franz Ferdinand, I texted Alex Kapranos saying, 'Does this exist on 7"?' It was a very 'hint, hint!' message, and Alex kindly sent me one. I still get excited when a song I love exists on 7"."

> "I don't see the 7" as just a niche retro idea, I still see it as the perfect format. The loss of the B-side is a lost opportunity for musicians"

aspect of the compilation, in more ways than one. I associate B-sides with freedom, I've never seen them as an obligation. The B-sides on *Single Life* gave me an outlet for power-pop, for want of a better term. *Beginner* is one of my favourite lyrics I've ever written and that was designed to be a B-side. *Spectral Eyes* is a real fans' favourite and that wouldn't exist without the B-side. I wrote it for Blondie but, once I got into it, I thought 'I'm keeping this!'"

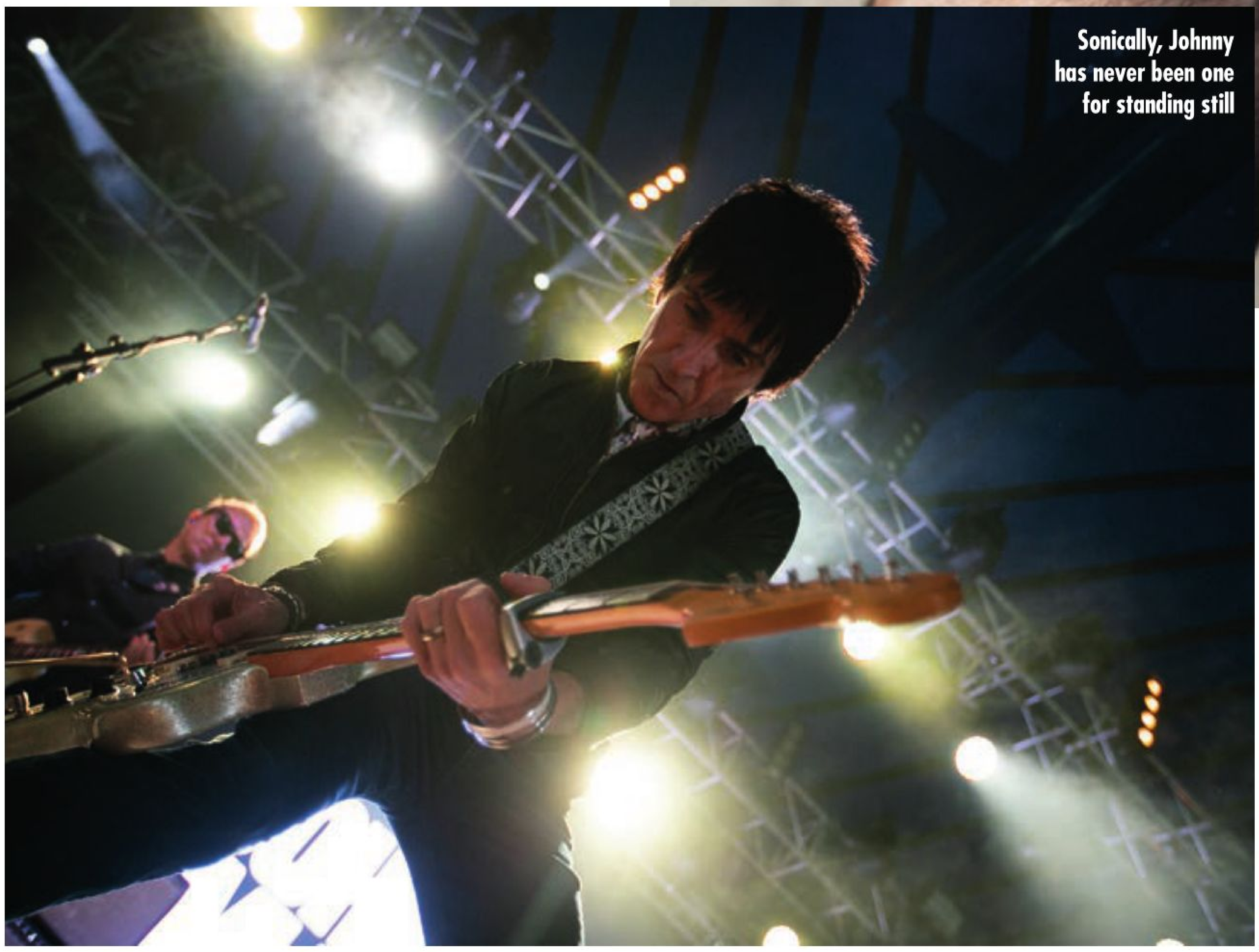
Asked for his favourite B-side, Johnny chooses The Isley Brothers' *One Too Many Heartaches*, featured on the B-side of their 1969 single *Behind A Painted Smile*, though he considers: "Any Isley Brothers B-side is amazing. That'd just trump *Child Of The Moon* by The Rolling Stones, which is a rare example of the Stones doing a great song just as a B-side. As a kid, the only way you could own *Child Of The Moon* was to have *Jumping Jack Flash*."

THE LONGER FORMAT

If Johnny Marr chose the single speed as his permanent body art affiliation, it doesn't mean he's any less enamoured with albums. Passionate and above all interested about all areas of music and people, Johnny is enthusiastic about everything music can give to people – and you may have noticed he has made some classic albums.

"I wanted to do it all," he laughs. "Pop is as much about the album as the single. The album is a good framework as a writer too, because if you've got an arc of 10 or 11 tracks, you want one that's a little bit maverick. That gives you the canvas to write a song like *Well I Wonder,* or *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* by The Smiths, or *New Dominions* and *Walk Into The Sea* on my stuff. I was very happy for The Smiths to be regarded as an albums band as well as a singles band – *Meat Is Murder* doesn't have a single on it. When I got into a certain space on it, I was aware that on *The Queen Is Dead* we were making a piece of art, an album that was totally its own entity."

Tattoo you: Johnny's indelible love of the 7" single format is on permanent display



Sonically, Johnny has never been one for standing still

KIERAN FROST/REDFERNS/GETTY NIALL LEA

Another classic album of Johnny's is Electronic's self-titled 1991 debut with Bernard Sumner, recently reissued on vinyl. Although Johnny had already revitalised The Pretenders and The The after The Smiths, Electronic were the first band Johnny had started since The Smiths ended in 1987. After immersing themselves in rave culture for *Technique*, New

Single Life collects together the first 10 solo single releases by Johnny Marr in a limited edition 7" box

"The album is a good framework as a writer too, because if you've got an arc of 10 or 11 tracks, you want one that's a little bit maverick"

Order were imploding in the financial debris of the Hacienda and Factory's collapse. "I felt the weight of expectation going into Electronic, because of who me and Bernard are," Johnny admits. "I did a fairly good job of putting that all to one side and not letting it get in the way. It was such a creative and inspiring time, not just for me, but for everyone of my age in Britain at that point. My house was insanely creative. And the good news is, I've had 30 years of people really liking that Electronic record." While making *Electronic*, Bernard was Johnny's housemate, living with his then girlfriend alongside Johnny and his wife Angie.

"Domesticity wasn't really a big part of Bernard's agenda at that point," says Johnny with much understatement. "Bernard was great if you like waking up to half the criminal fraternity of Manchester in your front room." The pair remain friends, but Johnny baulks at the idea of reforming, saying: "Bernard's busy in his band and I'm busy with mine."

Johnny is happy to see *Electronic* get re-released, but chooses 2009's *Ignore The Ignorant* by The Cribs as the album he's worked on that he'd love to see get the reissue treatment. Recording started when Johnny had just turned 45… "I'm really proud of that album, because there are just so many good songs on there," he muses.

"*Cheat On Me* and *We Share The Same Skies* are great 45s and *City Of Bugs* is a great album track, one of my favourite songs I've ever done. I remember writing that in a spooky little barn in Portland, Oregon. There's something in the air about *Ignore The Ignorant*, it feels to me like it'd be a really valid reissue. The Jarman brothers are a couple of generations along, but they have the same spirit as The Smiths for knowing how to make a great single package. There's a continuity to The Cribs' singles, which you can see in their artwork: it looks like a collection, the same as Buzzcocks, X-Ray Spex, The Strokes or anything Noel does."

Single Life ends on pulsating double A-side single *Armatopia/The Bright Parade*, two new songs that have been recorded since *Call The Comet*. Johnny won't be drawn on whether they'll be in tune with the sound of his next album, so the big question remains: has Johnny Marr got any singles lined up for his next record? "That really would be talking a good game," he laughs. "I'm pretty excited about a couple of the tunes, but I need to write appropriate words for them before I decide if they're singles yet."

Whenever Johnny Marr's next album does arrive, you can guarantee one thing: it'll have some outstanding 7"s to accompany it. ●

Ignorant Is Bliss

The Cribs' album is overdue the reissue treatment

Johnny Marr is right that The Cribs' album he was a band member for is due a reissue. He joined the Jarman brothers after meeting bassist Ross in Portland, Oregon, where Ross had moved with his wife and Johnny's then-band Modest Mouse were based. Guesting on The Cribs' 2008 tour, when they began work on *Ignore The Ignorant*, Johnny left Modest Mouse to become a full-time Crib.

Ignore The Ignorant hasn't been reissued since its initial limited vinyl run on Wichita in 2009. It currently goes for £45. Two 7" singles were released from the album. *Cheat On Me* was released in two different formats in August 2009. A clear vinyl 7" backed by a live version of *We Were Aborted* fetches around £10, while a posterbag edition featuring new B-side *So Hot Now* is £12. Second single *We Share The Same Skies* was released that November, with a live take of *City Of Bugs* on the B-side. The blue vinyl 7" costs £15. Johnny's other vinyl single from his Cribs days is a split 7" for 2010's Record Store Day. It features *So Hot Now* and Portland punks The Thermals' standalone single *Separate*. Issued on Kill Rock Stars, copies are plentiful at a fiver.

The Cribs' PR told *LLV* there are no plans for a reissue of *Ignore The Ignorant*, with the band at work on their eighth album, following 2017's *24-7 Rock Star Shit*.

Lloyd Cole, likes golf, Chelsea FC, passionate about his wife Elizabeth
© Paul Shoul

KEEPING US GUESSING

Lloyd Cole's new album Guesswork sees him marry his recent experiments with synthesisers to his lifelong gift for erudition and smart melodies. It's a classic record – but it very nearly didn't happen at all. Lloyd tells Classic Pop why it gets harder to contemplate making music, reviving lost Commotions demos and why he'll never be a passionate man.

JOHN EARLS

The first time *Classic Pop* hears from Lloyd Cole is with an emoji. Forty minutes before our scheduled Skype interview, he sends a waving hands emoji. The reason is simple – a mix-up over time differences between England and Lloyd's home in Massachusetts means *CP* is actually 20 minutes late calling him. Still, Lloyd Cole isn't someone who should be using emojis. He's too classy. Whatever next, David Attenborough battle rapping?

It's perhaps unfair to pigeonhole Lloyd as someone so stood apart from modern life. For one thing, recent experiments with electronics feed into his new album *Guesswork*. But, ever since Lloyd Cole And The Commotions languidly jangled at the public 35 years ago with debut album *Rattlesnakes*, the singer-songwriter has been more likely to be compared to Raymond Carver than Nik Kershaw. It's a perception Lloyd discusses on *The Loudness Wars*, the elegant finale of *Guesswork* in which he sings: "I'm a cold fish, nobody's choice dish/ And you're on fire".

The lyric encapsulates Lloyd's inner life – he's not given to great passion. No, not even for golf, which people have long called the singer's other great love away from music since he first revealed he's a strong amateur player. "*The Loudness Wars* is about the feeling of resignation and not being a particularly passionate person," he explains. "Something that gets me is when people talk about me and golf, saying, 'Oh, it's your passion.' I don't have fucking *passions*!" He spits the word as if it's as distasteful and unlikely as having stone cladding. "I'm happy about making music. I guess I love it. But I'd never use the word 'passion' about music either. I'm passionate about my wife, and that's about it." So you're a cold fish, as the song says? "I do feel I come from the cold fish team, yeah," he chuckles. "Sometimes, we have to play the fiery team. I love it when you have an argument with someone and they're not interested in logic, when people think, 'I believe this more than you, therefore I'm right.' It's awesome and it's frightening, especially when it's about something in politics that demonstrably isn't true."

THE CREATIVE DRIVE

Lloyd may not be passionate about music, but he does seem driven to make it, even though there's been a six-year gap between *Guesswork* and his previous album *Standards*. He wanted to make more music, but it's hard for him to do so until a definite framework of a record reveals

"I'M HAPPY ABOUT MAKING MUSIC. I GUESS I LOVE IT. BUT I'D NEVER USE THE WORD 'PASSION' ABOUT MUSIC. I'M PASSIONATE ABOUT MY WIFE, AND THAT'S ABOUT IT."

Cole's Twitter bio reads: "Him. Rattlesnakes – Standards. Warning – sports discussed here. Hate sports? Try my Facebook page." You can follow him @Lloyd_Cole

itself. "As soon as I had the rough recordings for *The Over Under* and *Moments And Whatnot,* there was a sound I could work towards," he says of the first two new songs to be ready. "Once I know a record is possible, that there's a sound I can work towards, I'm able to write. But I can't write with just some vague half-formed idea."

Lloyd Cole And The Commotions released all three of their albums over a three-year period before splitting after 1987's *Mainstream*, including hits like *Perfect Skin*, *Lost Weekend* and *Jennifer She Said.* It's a workrate that's simply not viable now. "There were moments that were more difficult making *Guesswork* than they have been in the past," he accepts. "A lot of that is because I don't have the energy levels I maintained when I was younger, when I was able to work 14-hour days. I'd be up here in my attic, doing stuff on my own, and it would exhaust me."

Chris Hughes, the producer of Tears For Fears and Peter Gabriel, is listed as Executive Producer for *Guesswork*. Essentially, this is because of the moral support Hughes provided for his friend. "Without Chris' help, it probably would have been too difficult to make this record," Lloyd admits. "Chris was around, mostly on Skype, to constantly encourage me. He persuaded me this was a record that really was worth the effort of making it. After almost every album, there's a point where I'm in limbo, where I'm not sure whether I've just made my last album. That went on for a long time after *Standards.* It got to a point where I'd taken so long that, if I was ever going to make another record, it'd have to be now – otherwise I was going to have to get a day job."

If *Guesswork* sounds like it might be a tortuous record, ponderous from over-thinking, don't worry: it's bloody brilliant. Having returned to rock'n'roll on *Standards*, Lloyd brings that album's energy to bear on what could reasonably be described as his first great synth-pop record in *Guesswork*. Ladies and gentlemen: Lloyd Cole is ready for the dancefloor. He deflects the idea, but *Violins* is an absolute banger. "Really, *Violins* is just Robert Palmer's *Johnny And Mary* meets a beat that's Robyn or Pet Shop Boys," he reasons. "It's not a radical concept. What I love about *Johnny And Mary* is its Krautrock feel – it just goes and goes and doesn't change much. Up to a point, that's what I tried to do on *Violins*." Of the similarly energetic *Moments And Whatnot*, Lloyd explains: "I was messing around with syncopation and ended up with something a bit like Kraftwerk's *Trans-Europe Express*. It wasn't what was I aiming for but, once it happened, I thought, 'Oh, this is lovely!' It's odd and it's pop at the same time."

ELECTRIC DREAMS

Although it's been a while since *Standards*, Lloyd hasn't been idle. In the interim, he'd begun paving the way for *Guesswork* by experimenting with electronic music, working with modern composer Hans-Joachim Roedelius and on a sound installation at the University Of South Australia, which opened in 2017.

Guesswork attempts "to bridge the two worlds I've been living in", but Lloyd admits he was nervous about

DON'T GET WEIRD ON TWITTER, BABE

Although it's less known than his 'love' of golf, Lloyd Cole is a football fan, too, sometimes giving his opinion about the sport and the quality of its US TV coverage on Twitter.

Although a Chelsea fan, he's only been to see them play twice, admitting: "Chelsea fans are the most horrible people. They spent the whole game shouting nasty stuff at our own players, so I've never been back. I wish I'd decided to support Nottingham Forest, but it's too late now." He despairs of Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich's short-term managerial recruitment policy, saying: "Surely we should be looking at Eddie Howe and thinking, 'If he can do that at Bournemouth, imagine what he could do at Chelsea.' But no, we never make such plans."

Lloyd occasionally debates football with other fans on Twitter, saying: "Twitter isn't something I spend quality time on, but if I'm stuck backstage for 20 minutes with nothing to do and it's not long enough to start reading, Twitter is great for those moments."

He recently started a surreal Twitter debate with Stephen Duffy about the merits of Black Sabbath, admitting: "If Twitter had been around in 1985, I'm sure I'd have argued with Stephen back then, too. I probably would have been into it to the same degree as I am now."

He also has an official Facebook account, but confesses: "I don't really understand Facebook. I'll announce stuff on there and occasionally share a piece of music I like, but I don't really interact with Facebook."

© Paul Shoul

> "SINCE BAD VIBES, I'VE HAD A DEMARCATION OF WEARING MY ELECTRONIC HAT ONE WEEK, MY SONG HAT THE WEEK AFTER AND NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET."

trying to make electronic pop songs after the failure of his 1993 album *Bad Vibes*. "That was the last time I tried to make electronic songs," he recalls. "It was a bit of a disaster, so it was a little frightening to put songs with words and electronic music together. Since *Bad Vibes*, I've had a demarcation of wearing my electronic hat one week, my song hat the week after and never the twain shall meet. But I'd been working in electronic music for a while, and it was fun. If you can do something for fun, and it's also your job, then you're pretty lucky. So why not give it a try? There's an awful lot of stuff going on, like drum machines and arpeggiators, that I haven't tried before."

Lloyd's other concern in recent years has been revisiting his past: first on 2014 Commotions boxset *Collected Works*, then on 2017's box *Lloyd Cole In New York*, which collates his first solo music up to fourth album *Love Story* from 1995. In *Moments And Whatnot*, Lloyd sings about preferring to live in the future. How did it feel to be confronted by his past? "Less painful than I expected," he admits. "There really isn't a lot of music I've put my name to that I'm sorry about. I've never been massively falsely modest about my work – I'm happy with most of it, and I wouldn't put it out if I didn't think it was good."

Those compilations coincided with Lloyd trying to catalogue his past in a more homemade fashion. In his attic, there are several "lovely" retro cassette cabinets housing ancient demo tapes Lloyd recently rediscovered in his basement. "There were cassettes I didn't know I still had," he says. "I became briefly obsessed with wondering what was on them all after all these years. I've still only gone through about 20% of the cassettes, but next time I have a couple of weeks free I'll go through and listen to some more."

That first batch Lloyd listened to produced new album track *When I Came Down From The Mountain*, based on an instrumental which Commotions keyboardist Blair Cowan had written for the band in ➡

***Bad Vibes* was Lloyd Cole's third solo album, released in October 1993**
© Paul Shoul

1986. "I remember thinking at the time, 'We should do something with this,'" Lloyd laughs. "We never did, of course. I sent Blair a copy of the demo back to him and said, 'Can we revisit this?'" Blair was happy to oblige – he'd already been intermittently sending potential demos to Lloyd for the new album, as Lloyd explains: "Blair sends me finished instrumentals, and every now and again I'll say, 'I think this one could be a song.' That was the same as would sometimes happen in The Commotions. *Brand New Friend* was an instrumental piece of Blair's I took and made into a song."

The gorgeous *Remains* is Blair's other co-write on *Guesswork*. "Blair delivered the music for *Remains* about six years ago," Lloyd recalls. "I thought it was just beautiful and I lived with it for a really long time. I wasn't able to come up with a lyric that could work until the rest of the album was underway. I realised the songs didn't necessarily need to have traditional verse/chorus pop arrangements – they could be more Broadway, for instance, and that way of thinking made *Remains* possible. I certainly couldn't have made a song like it 15 years ago, because I'd never have thought about writing in that non-pop way."

GOING ACOUSTIC

Although predominately an electronic album, Lloyd does play guitar on *Guesswork*. So, too, does another former Commotions bandmate, Neil Clark, who will join Lloyd as the other musician on the singer's tour to accompany the new record in October. "The idea of touring this album is terrifying," frets Lloyd. "Neil and I are going out as an acoustic duo, but the nature of these songs means we're going to have to be a pretty avant-garde acoustic duo. I don't want to take tapes or computers on stage, and we're figuring out ways to make it work. I've already played *The Afterlife* acoustically at shows, so at least that's one song that works!"

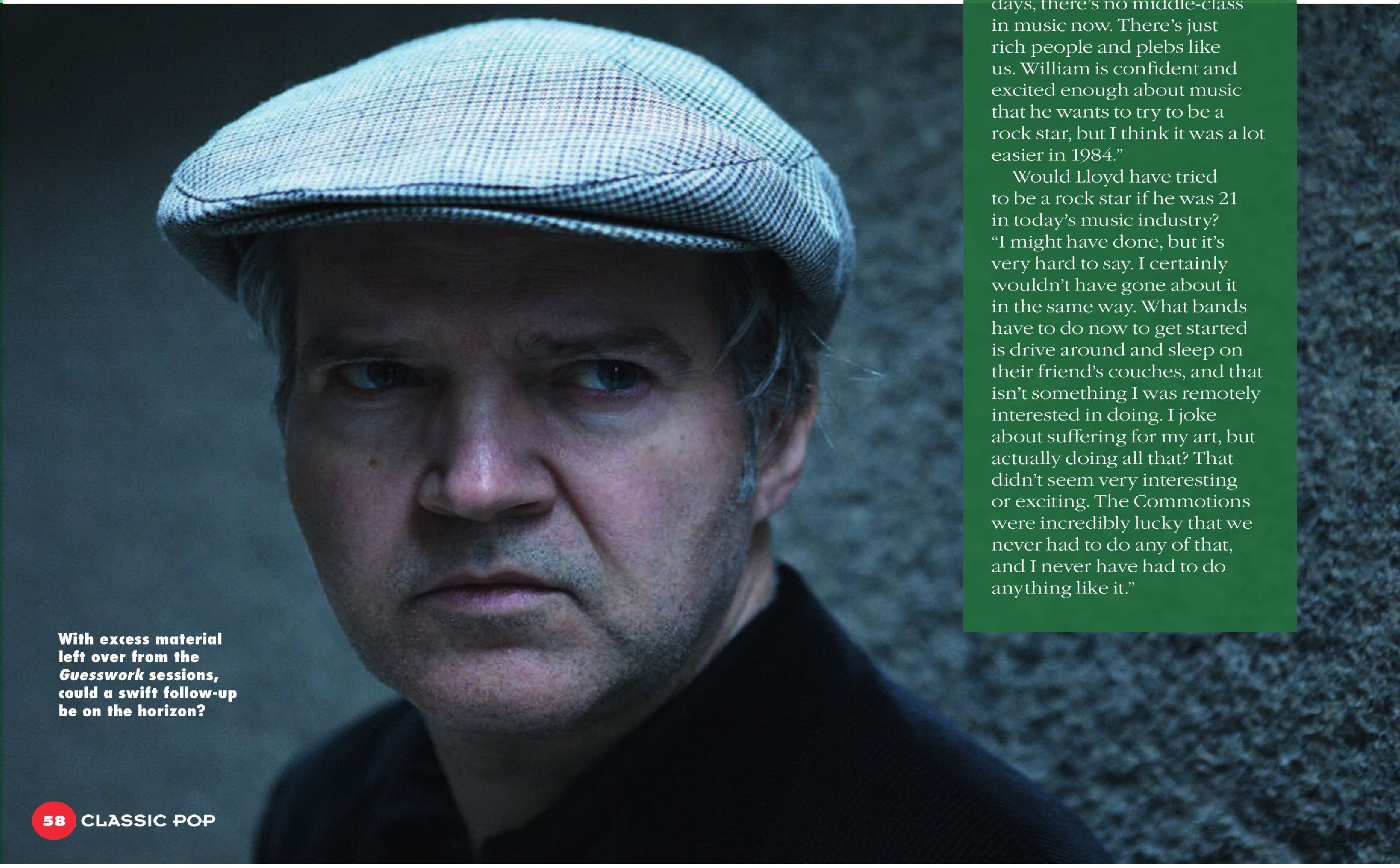
Lloyd was determined not to add keyboard players into the mix on tour either. He's not joking when he says: "Having a full band on tour the whole time isn't something I want anymore. Not having that in my life is one of the few things that keeps me alive and healthy. We're starting out as just me and Neil and we'll see how it goes. Maybe if the tour is a massive success we'll do full-band shows."

Extra gigs were quickly added once the *Guesswork* tour went on sale to meet demand, but Lloyd is suspicious of the notion that it means he's back in fashion. "I'm not an oldies artist, so the economic side of my life these days means that, when I bring a new record out, people are interested in seeing me again," the 58-year-old points out. "When my album *Antidepressant* came out, I played The Arts Theatre in 2006, a really little venue off Leicester Square. Two nights there holds a lot fewer people than one show at Union Chapel, the venue in London I'm playing on this tour. The reality is, the British don't like middle-aged people – they prefer young or old artists. I've had to wait to get old to get that respect! More people have been coming to my concerts in the last few years, and I've certainly not been selling any more records. I've actually been selling less, but because I'm out

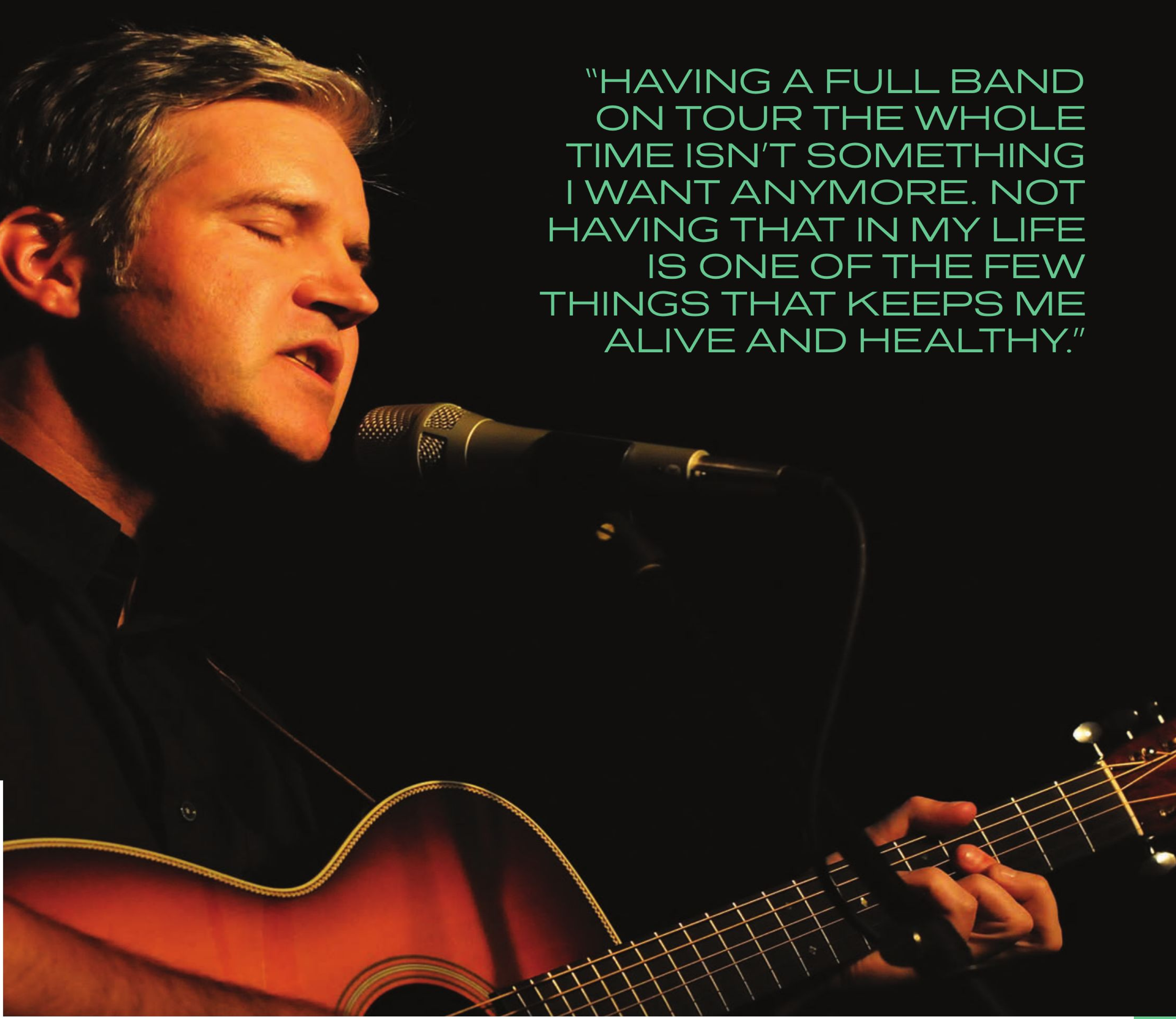
THE FUTURE OF COLE

Lloyd and his wife Elizabeth celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary this year. The couple have two children, William and Frank. William recently played the first shows with his own band, Herakles. "I'm terrified for William," Lloyd admits. "The world that was possible for our band in 1984 just doesn't exist anymore. Very much like the socio-economic world these days, there's no middle-class in music now. There's just rich people and plebs like us. William is confident and excited enough about music that he wants to try to be a rock star, but I think it was a lot easier in 1984."

Would Lloyd have tried to be a rock star if he was 21 in today's music industry? "I might have done, but it's very hard to say. I certainly wouldn't have gone about it in the same way. What bands have to do now to get started is drive around and sleep on their friend's couches, and that isn't something I was remotely interested in doing. I joke about suffering for my art, but actually doing all that? That didn't seem very interesting or exciting. The Commotions were incredibly lucky that we never had to do any of that, and I never have had to do anything like it."



With excess material left over from the *Guesswork* sessions, could a swift follow-up be on the horizon?



there and I've not retired, maybe I've assumed a certain status that people like. There have been times when it's been more difficult for me, but now? People seem to like the idea of the elder statesman rather more than the struggling middle-aged statesman."

Speaking of elder statesmen, Lloyd is usually a perceptive thinker about the state of music. But his quote in an interview around *Standards* that his former friend Morrissey has "managed his status better than me" no longer holds water, given Morrissey's odious far-right politicising in the past few years.

The pair got to know each other after Morrissey attended a Commotions show in London in the summer of 1984 when The Smiths were reaching their peak. Morrissey suggested – entirely wrongly, as Lloyd now admits – that the Commotions song *James* was "the best thing you've ever written" when the band were making their second album *Easy Pieces*.

"We were friends for six months and I just don't know what he thinks anymore," says Lloyd, wary of getting drawn into trying to analyse Morrissey's toxicity. "He always loved rubbing people up the wrong way, so that isn't new, but he does seem like he's doing some very bad things."

Lloyd is far happier, as *Moments And Whatnot* attests, to discuss his future. He promises there won't be another six-year wait for his next album, revealing there are "four or five" songs already being strongly considered.

"I get most excited when I make records that are like starting again," he enthuses, not quite passionately. "The first Commotions record, the first solo record and *Music In A Foreign Language* were like nothing I've done in the past. I suppose *Guesswork* is the fourth time it's happened. I've got ideas I didn't finish for this record that are very strong. Sometimes, you write ideas for songs and it's just not the right time: I found a song of Neil's the other day from 2005 intended for the record after *Antidepressant* that didn't fit *Broken Record* that's well worth revisiting.

"Neil and Blair have come up with some really strong new ideas, too. The songs on *Guesswork* are quite long, and I'd consciously like some shorter songs next time as a contrast."

It helps that Lloyd has now successfully mastered the technology required to make electronic pop. "I've got an awesome set-up for these type of songs," he says. "I'm really happy with the rhythm section sound and I see no need to return to live drums next time out, though I think there will be more guitar." There's a long pause, as Lloyd considers whether he really will be industrious in his attic. "There's the starting point for another record, so it should be a lot quicker next time. In theory…"

Another new Lloyd Cole record so soon? That's totally 💯.

● ***Guesswork* is out now on earMUSIC**

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